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Goals of the *Africanus Journal*

The *Africanus Journal* is an academic, multilingual journal. Its goals are to promote:

- a. the mission and work of the members and mentors of the Africanus Guild Ph.D. Research Program of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, based on the Boston campus (the Center for Urban Ministerial Education [CUME]).
- b. the principles of the Africanus Guild (evangelical orthodox Christian men and women who are multicultural, multiracial, urban-oriented, studying a Bible without error in a cooperative way).

Scholarly papers may be submitted normally by those who are in a ThM, DMin, or PhD program or who have a ThM, DMin, PhD, EdD, or equivalent degree.

Current publications authored by professors and students of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston Campus (Center for Urban Ministerial Education), are featured interspersed throughout the journal.

<http://www.gordonconwell.edu/boston/africanusjournal>

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Life of Julius Africanus

Julius Africanus was probably born in Jerusalem, many scholars think around a.d. 200. Africanus was considered by the ancients as a man of consummate learning and sharpest judgment (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 6:128). He was a pupil of Heracles, distinguished for philosophy and other Greek learning, in Alexandria, Egypt around a.d. 231–233. In a.d. 220/226, he performed some duty in behalf of Nicopolis (formerly Emmaus) in Palestine. Later he likely became bishop of Emmaus (Eusebius, *History*, VI.xxxi.2). Origen calls him “a beloved brother in God the Father, through Jesus Christ, His holy Child” (*Letter from Origen to Africanus* 1). Fellow historian Eusebius distinguishes him as “no ordinary historian” (*History*, I. vi.2). Eusebius describes the five books of *Chronologies* as a “monument of labor and accuracy” and cites extensively from his harmony of the evangelists’ genealogies (*History*, VI. xxxi. 1–3). Africanus was a careful historian who sought to defend the truth of the Bible. He is an ancient example of meticulous, detailed scholarship which is historical, biblical, truthful, and devout.

Even though Eusebius describes Africanus as the author of the *Kestoi*, Jerome makes no mention of this (*ANF* 6:124). The author of *Kestoi* is surnamed Sextus, probably a Libyan philosopher who arranged a library in the Pantheon at Rome for the Emperor. The *Kestoi* was probably written toward the end of the 200s. It was not written by a Christian since it contains magical incantations (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* III.412).

The Greek text of Africanus’s writings may be found in Martinus Josephus Routh, *Reliquiae sacrae* II (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974 [1846]), 225–309, and Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, Karl Pinggéra, eds., William Adler, trans., *Julius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 15 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

The extant writings of Julius Africanus may be found in vol. 1, no 1, April 2009 edition of the *Africanus Journal*.

Other Front Matter

Editorial team

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Summary of Content

This issue explores Living System Ministry as a philosophy of urban ministry developed by Douglas A. Hall and the Emmanuel Gospel Center over forty years of ministry in Boston’s South End. The issue contains essays on the potential of a “Living System Theology” and several case studies demonstrating the use of Living System Ministry principles.



Mentoring Scholars in a New Millennium

THE JULIUS AFRICANUS GUILD

was created at the Boston campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with the purpose of identifying and nurturing evangelical minority doctoral students with the potential to impact the global Body of Christ significantly through their scholarship.

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"I am eternally grateful to the Africanus Guild, which has helped me fulfill God's call and realize a personal dream. I could not be working on my PhD in Old Testament without the financial help, prayers, and educational support I receive through the Guild."

—QUONEKUIA DAY

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Living System Ministry

Toward a Mature and Productive Twenty-First Century Christianity

Douglas A. Hall and Judy Hall

Global Christianity faces a crucial challenge. Following World War II, Christianity grew dramatically from being a Western religion to becoming a world faith in about one generation. It experienced massive revivals around the world in places such as Korea, China, Africa, Latin America, and the northeast parts of India.¹ But while Christianity has grown worldwide, it is now encountering a problem. Major revivals were birthed and developed within cohesive relational cultures, but now, as relational cultures everywhere begin to disintegrate, and cultures are being reshaped by the effects of the predominance of technology, these revivals are showing signs of reaching their peak.² The decline after the peak of revival can last for generations, as has been the case in Europe.

What if the problem of the decline of revival actually becomes a concern to us? We recognize that the Holy Spirit has the ultimate role in where and how revival happens, but could there be anything we or someone else could do to change things, beyond, of course, making these large problems a matter of fervent prayer? The size of the problem puts us off. But, for the sake of argument, let's say we begin to think about ways we can turn the tide. What if we or our churches banded together and thought through how we might make a difference? There is little likelihood that we could solve the problem. And that is not because it is too big a problem to solve, but because, to solve big problems, we need different paradigms of action than we are used to.

The decline of revival is a systemic problem. An unthinkable huge system is affected. People who study systemic—even global—problems say that large systems have their own rules. They say that systemic problems will be amplified, not solved, by the usual ways we go about trying to solve them. When trying to solve a problem that deals with an entire system, our sincere attempts to solve it—as good as they may seem—can produce unintended negative consequences and actually become part of the larger problem.³ We've seen, for example, how an effort to fight drugs has produced a larger drug problem over time, or how a project to help the poor has made more people poor.⁴

Huge problems in social systems—such as the potential decline of great revivals—must first be clearly identified, and it takes a significant amount of time to accurately understand a systemic problem and then to try to discover and successfully implement relevant systemic solutions.

We think the revivals are facing decline because of the change of culture. The culture that hosted the birth of these huge revivals in the Global South, for example, is changing rapidly. I am not proposing that we or anyone could change the culture so it is a better host to revival, but we can start by trying first to understand the living system dynamics that were present in the vital relational cultures that produced these revivals, and then find a new cohesive basis of spiritual vitality in the newly emerging technologically based cultures. Can these revivals be properly contextualized to the new cultures before they die?

1 See Philip Jenkins's books on global growth of Christianity: *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

2 For example, we are hearing many reports of a slowing or decline in the Korean revival from our Korean students.

3 See Douglas and Judy Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 108.

4 See Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett, *When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009).

In this article, we will show how Living System Ministry can be used to address challenges such as this one. Living System Ministry can help nurture vitality in the local church and also give critical insights for Christianity in the new hi-tech culture unfolding in our world.

The cat and the toaster

We need to start by seeing the difference between those things we can easily solve and understand and those things that are of a more complex nature and require different thinking and different tools to address. So let's start with this question: What is the difference between a cat and a toaster? For more than two decades, I have asked this question of the urban ministry students in all my classes to help them begin to understand the difference between living system design and constructed design.

The essential difference is this: The cat, representing the living creations that God makes, is a highly complex and thoroughly interrelated living system. The toaster, representing what people make, is a comparatively simple constructed thing.

Why does this matter? We need to learn to understand how the world that God created works. We understand the nature of living systems in the physical world that God made, but for some reason we have trouble seeing it in the social and spiritual world. It's easy to see a cat as a living system, but difficult for us to see social systems, like our churches and ministries, also as living systems. We go about our work in ministry assuming that everything in our world is of the same nature—fashioned in a simplistic cause-and-effect design, like a toaster, easily understood and easily fixed. We need to break out of that box!

In Living System Ministry, we have to leave the “easy fix-it” pliers and screwdrivers behind. We need a new way of thinking in order to look at our churches and ministries and see life (as symbolized by the cat) instead of defaulting to the use of mental models better suited to technology and machines (as represented by the toaster). As we begin to think more in terms of living systems, we will find that God's living truth—both as revealed in the person of Christ⁵ and as the written word which is “living and active” and which “penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow”⁶—can be even more applicable in directing our ministry activities and can tell us what to do!

Viewing our social systems as living systems is not a new discipline for the church. Paul exhorted New Testament believers to see the corporate church in the city as a living system. The word of God describes the church in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 as an organic body, not as a collection of individuals or an organization. And yet this concept may be difficult for us today. Are we thinking in terms of organic unity when we think about our own church or all the churches in the city? When we make decisions, are we considering how those decisions will affect the *entire* body of Christ? Are we truly aware that the church is an interrelated living body as the Bible teaches, or have we narrowed our minds to think of the church as just the folks who show up on Sundays in one particular place? Seeing the local church as a complex, interrelated living organ of the larger body and not simply an organization with programs and people will profoundly change how we do ministry.

All living systems—whether we're talking about the human body or the church—are orderly, interrelated arrangements of living components that work together to accomplish a high-level goal. In other words, the living components that make up living systems are incredibly complex and interconnected, and they work together to accomplish the higher purpose of the whole system. This is true of living physical, social, and spiritual systems. The only way we can begin to understand and nurture the vitality of a living system is to learn about these interrelated variables and how they

⁵ John 1:1–4.

⁶ Heb 4:12.

work together. But perhaps you are wondering, as I did, “How do I ever learn to minister in a living system that is so complex? How do I keep all the factors and variables straight? Don’t they get all tangled up?”

Conscious thought limits our understanding of God’s living system design

There is something hidden in plain sight that greatly influences everyone, and yet no one knows it even exists! This is the basic limitation of the capacity of our own conscious thought in how we mentally process complexity. In 1956, George Miller wrote that, when we use conscious thought, we cannot process more than seven variables at a time. “There seems to be some limitation built into us,” he said, “either by learning or by the design of our nervous systems, a limit that keeps our channel capacity in this general range [of seven variables].”⁷

Because of this inherent limitation of the conscious mind, when we want to understand something that involves many, many complex variables, we tend to break it down into separate parts. This can be very useful for accomplishing many of our normal tasks, but it limits us in seeing as a unified whole an interrelated system involving multitudes of variables. And yet, most of us are totally unaware of this natural, cognitive limitation.

Some scientists have recognized this limitation of conscious thinking. Einstein said, “I never discovered anything with my rational mind,”⁸ meaning that he never discovered any significant breakthroughs through conscious thought alone. Until very recently, the social sciences seemed unaware of the limitations of conscious thought, but now are beginning to discuss these barriers and ways to move past them. Inamori of Kyocera says: “When I am concentrating . . . I enter the subconscious⁹ mind. It is said that human beings possess both a conscious and subconscious mind and that our subconscious mind has a capacity that is larger by a factor of ten. . . .”¹⁰

What both Einstein and Inamori recognized is that we must move beyond rational thought, using our subconscious mind, in order to process our very complex world. So how do we deal with those challenging situations we face every day which have multitudes of interrelated variables? We can try to understand the system as a whole, dealing with high levels of complexity through subconscious thought. Our subconscious mind is created by God to be capable of processing complex reality, far beyond what our conscious mind can handle.

The process of learning Living System Ministry and working within living systems is not unlike learning to speak a foreign language fluently, to play a musical instrument artistically, or any number of other common experiences. As in these cases, we easily move from our conscious minds to our subconscious minds in order to process and carry out these tasks because only in the subconscious can we deal effectively with the complexity. Those social sciences dealing with large systems are learning how to process high levels of interrelated complexity *consciously*, understanding that it requires a blending of both conscious and subconscious thought. MIT theorist Peter Senge says that “reintegrating reason and intuition may prove to be one of the primary contributions of systems thinking.”¹¹

Relying on conscious thought alone in working with living systems limits our understanding of this highly complex world—physically, socially, and spiritually. But neither is it useful to rely on subconscious thinking alone. Many Christian practitioners are carrying out effective ministry

7 George A. Miller, “The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information,” *Psychological Review* 63 (1956), 81–97. Also mentioned in materials by Idon Magnetics, Perthshire, Scotland, <http://www.idonresources.com>. (See explanatory footnote in *The Cat and the Toaster*, 147).

8 Quoted in Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 169.

9 Senge states, “There is an aspect of our mind that is exceedingly capable of dealing with complexity. We call this dimension of mind the ‘subconscious,’ because it operates ‘below’ or ‘behind’ the level of conscious awareness.” *The Fifth Discipline*, 163.

10 Quoted in Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 162.

11 Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 169.

using their subconscious understanding, which can be keenly attuned to the Holy Spirit. And while some people may understand living systems and even do ministry on a subconscious level, in order to teach others to do what they do so well, they need to be taught to identify *why* what they do subconsciously or intuitively is effective, bringing their hidden subconscious understanding of ministry practice to the conscious level.

Living System Ministry can help us learn to use both our conscious and subconscious understanding in seeking to comprehend whole systems. As we recognize that unseen obstacle, the natural limitation of our conscious thinking, we can then work to develop our ability to see in a new way an interrelated and complex world that we never saw before.

Building on the growing links between faith and science

A developing correlation between faith and today's systemic sciences can be greatly beneficial to Christianity. Christians need to be students of both special¹² and natural revelation. Our understanding of the Bible can actually be enhanced by the sciences—especially by the newly developing systemic sciences—because they can give us a better understanding of natural revelation than we received from past social sciences demonstrating a more fragmented worldview.

Creation is permeated with life and all that defines it. It tells us of a living God who created a living creation. We need this revelation from the natural world because it teaches us how God sees living realities. Christ's church is a living organism, not an organization. When we lose our perception of the essence of life which is fundamental to God's creation, then we are in danger of losing our ability to operate in tune with God and the way he operates in and through living systems. We can learn from natural revelation how to stay in tune with how living systems work.

Christians focus a lot of effort in understanding how to accurately “read” our special revelation. To be sure, God gave us the Bible. But he also revealed himself in the created world. Why, then, have Christians spent less energy learning to “read” that form of revelation?¹³ When theology was the king of science, Christians engaged in learning about the natural world and contributed to the development of science.¹⁴ But, over time, as science has developed, Christians have abdicated that role.

For some time I have been thinking about the systemic social sciences, such as cultural anthropology, systems thinking, family therapy, community psychology, and public health, and it seems to me that some of these disciplines are beginning to “read” natural revelation more accurately. What they are finding seems to be in greater alignment with a biblical and Christian perspective. As systems theory is being applied in some of these fields, it is creating subdisciplines such as “systems ecology” or “systems psychology.”

Systems science is a technical term that includes many disciplines.¹⁵ Some proponents of these

12 By “special revelation,” I am referring to the word of God, the Bible, though some expand the meaning to include many other ways God speaks to people.

13 Here we must point out that we are not advocating a “reading” of natural revelation over special revelation, as we hold strongly to the belief that the lessons learned from natural revelation must always be interpreted in light of special revelation. We are merely suggesting that there is a real way in which natural revelation can inform and flesh out our understanding of special revelation, much like Jesus did when he taught that we should consider the birds of the air and how God cares for them to learn about how much and in what way God cares for us (Matt 6:26).

14 “Sir Isaac Newton (25 December 1642 – 20 March 1727) was an English physicist, mathematician, astronomer, natural philosopher, alchemist, and theologian, who has been ‘considered by many to be the greatest and most influential scientist who ever lived’” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton). While orthodox theologians have always questioned Newton's theology, and contemporary scientists now question his physics, he did represent an era that attempted to interrelate theology and science.

15 “Systems science is an interdisciplinary field of science that studies the nature of complex systems in nature, society, and science. It aims to develop interdisciplinary foundations, which are applicable in a variety of areas, such as engineering, biology, medicine and social sciences. Systems sciences covers formal sciences fields like complex systems, cybernetics, dynamical systems theory, and systems theory, and applications in the field of the natural and social sciences and

new disciplines—like Steven Johnson, who contends that cities are living systems like animals (even comparing a city to a scaled-up elephant!)—are beginning to understand the living nature of urban systems¹⁶ and to see the world and how it operates as an interrelated living system. This kind of thinking is very helpful to those of us doing ministry in cities.

Many physical sciences, such as ecology, physiology, medicine, and physics, have had the ability to understand highly complex living systems for much of their history, and what they are now beginning to “read” in the systemic physical sciences more accurately agrees with God’s revelation in the Bible. The living system nature of creation comes through again and again, as evidenced by their acknowledgement of nature’s interrelatedness and interdependence.

Those working in the fields of ecology and the environment, for example, are beginning to express catastrophic prophecies about the world similar to what we see in the Book of Revelation as they view the condition of our natural world through a living system orientation.

Increasingly, physical and social sciences have become interdisciplinary and systemic, understanding both the natural and social worlds as highly complex and interdependent living systems. The limitless capacity of living systems to interrelate their various components, demonstrated by our own brains’ amazing management of billions of neurons, aids our progress in accurately reading natural revelation to see one unified natural world with not only the physical, but also the social and spiritual realms all interacting with each other.

Until now, due to the limitations of conscious thought, we have been seeing the world in fragmented parts, including what we comprehend through both science and faith. For a long time, science has been broken down into all types of specializations that separate physical science from social science, and even within those sciences, further specialties. Similarly, special revelation has often been divided into separate pieces of theology.

Many of today’s sciences are seeing the world as a complex, interrelated system. New systemic and interdisciplinary sciences are being developed and are growing rapidly. These sciences are better able to bridge the historic gap between faith and science. Christians can learn and grow from new understandings that help us go beyond our limited orientation of God’s world. And, by enlarging our understanding of his natural revelation through use of these new disciplines, we can better understand how special revelation can be fleshed out in our contemporary world.

What we can learn from systems thinking

In 1971, I read *Urban Dynamics* by Jay W. Forrester, who is considered to be the founder of the social discipline of systems thinking.¹⁷ Systems thinking looks at large systems like businesses, organizations, cities, and cultures from a wide perspective, taking in overall patterns and cycles in the whole system instead of focusing on isolated fragments or single events. This broad view can help us identify the real system-level problems in our world and understand how to address them so that real change can take place.

Systems thinking provides a framework for us to operate in more appropriate ways in our highly complex world. As a Christian practitioner working for many years in Boston, I have found the insights of systems thinking to be extraordinarily important to me. The more I seek to interrelate the understandings of systems thinking with my ministry, the more I find myself moving

engineering, such as control theory, operations research, social systems theory, systems biology, systems dynamics, systems ecology, systems engineering and systems psychology.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems_science.

16 Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 8–10. “Several years ago, the theoretical physicist Geoffrey West decided to investigate whether Kleiber’s law applied to one of life’s largest creations: the superorganisms of human-built cities.” . . . “If an elephant was just a scaled-up mouse, then, from an energy perspective, a city was just a scaled-up elephant.”

17 Jay W. Forrester, *Urban Dynamics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971). See chapter 6, “Notes on Complex Systems.”

into the realm of a living system understanding of ministry, an understanding that nurtures the body of Christ and not simply my own ministry.

Since the 1970s, I have incorporated the teachings of the systemic sciences into seminary courses for urban ministry practitioners. Over the last fifteen years, we have been asking students in our urban ministry class to study Peter Senge's five systems thinking disciplines and to show biblical parallels to them, explaining how these disciplines can be applied practically in ministry. More than four hundred students from all backgrounds and cultures have been able to do this exercise, drawing illustrations from Scripture. This demonstrates what I referred to earlier: systems thinking can help us see *natural* revelation as a complementary component to understanding and applying the truth of *special* revelation. Through this exercise, we are learning how to "do the truth" of special revelation in contemporary cultures. We are learning how the truth of special revelation informs our understanding of living social systems and how our understanding of living social systems illuminates our ability to properly apply Scripture in our contemporary world.

While systems thinking seems to take us to the threshold of Living System Ministry, in that it helps us learn to work with the immense complexity of social systems, it never quite takes us through that door. When I speak of Living System Ministry, I am attempting to walk us through that door, and that is not an easy task. Our Judeo-Christian understanding does not relate directly to the specific development of systems thinking, which has only emerged in the last century. But it does relate to Living System Ministry, which is firmly grounded in the New Testament and has existed for thousands of years in the vital and highly relational cultures of the past, and which we see described in the first century church.

The role of primary and secondary culture and the new global reality

For most of human history, the majority of people lived in a way that we have come to describe as "primary culture"—common people who lived in close proximity to the natural world. They relied on personal, primary relationships and naturally demonstrated what are actually very complex characteristics such as oral communication, learning by modeling, identifying with extended family systems, and a spiritual approach to life. They were very aware of the physical environment around them, which was made up of complex, interrelated, living components.

Today, in the Western world and many other countries, the advancement of technology has brought us into what we call "secondary culture," where the majority of people rely on impersonal, secondary relationships and demonstrate such correlating characteristics as individualism; a preference for written communication over the spoken word; emphasis on a nuclear family rather than large, extended family groups; a preference for formal learning rather than modeling; and a scientific rather than spiritual approach to life. In secondary culture, it's extremely difficult for people to see the living systems around them. Unlike many people in primary cultures who lived in villages or farmed land, secondary culture folk live in electricity-filled houses and high-rise condos, all of which create physical separation from the living system environment around them.

This shift from the majority of people living in primary cultures to secondary cultures has been one of the most dramatic cultural transitions in all of human history. The world has changed! Since the middle of the twentieth century, it seems the entire Western culture has gone from being the relationship-centered, primary culture it was for most of history to becoming a construct-centered, technologically based secondary culture. I call this societal change "The Great Transition."

People in primary cultures used subconscious thought a great deal to process the high levels of complexity in their natural environment. Imagine a farmer who is in tune with the living system creation of the natural and social world. In order to grow crops, the farmer must be aware of the seasons and know when to plant, harvest, or bring the sheep to upper pastures.

The problem with secondary culture is that, because it operates in several degrees of separation from the natural world, there is a lack of understanding of how healthy, interrelated living systems work. Secondary culture more widely tends to use simplistic forms of conscious thought to define its operation as a highly fragmented culture.

Living System Ministry can help us recover the ability to understand and to work in a complex reality, which has been lost by elite secondary aspects of culture. If we are to work within living systems, we can no longer break down our view of the world into many unrelated, disconnected parts, because this would be the exact opposite of the actual interrelated living system world.

The systemic sciences—which increasingly attempt to see the whole rather than parts—are indigenous to secondary culture, but can be important assets to Christianity as it seeks to thrive in this new culture. The more we learn from the systemic sciences, the more we will be able to understand the interrelated complexities of living systems through both our conscious and subconscious thought processes. This will allow us to better interrelate physical, social and spiritual realities, all of which ultimately are living systems. Because these systemic sciences can now better teach us about the nature of the living system world that God created, they are tools that can help us understand God and his ways as he reveals them through nature. Just as a telescope helps us see the distant stars that are part of natural revelation, so the systems sciences are conceptual tools that aid us in understanding large, living social systems.

The more we learn from systemic sciences, the more we can actually see special revelation truth lived out in our secondary twenty-first century culture. This is crucial if we are to do our part to see global revivals maintain spiritual vitality and continue to grow in our new highly technological world.

Living System Ministry and the kingdom of God

In the New Testament, believers reached the then-known world in approximately one generation. How did they do this? It was not through any large Christian organization or program. Such groups did not exist in the first century. It was through the natural dynamics of living social systems and how they operate. The apostles used the nature of the ancient city to reach the ancient world. The living social system of a city is a key for building God's kingdom. The cities of the twenty-first century are far bigger than their first-century counterparts. Half the population of the world lives in cities,¹⁸ and so cities today are even better able to reach our world than were the cities of the first century. As first-century believers used the living aspects of ancient cities, so we, too, must use the living aspects of modern cities.

Over the years, we have learned that Boston has and continues to experience an incredible revival that we call the Quiet Revival. In over four decades, the number of churches in Boston has nearly doubled, from approximately 300 in 1970 to 575 in 2010. Also, the estimated percentage of the city's population in churches has increased from about 3 percent to about 14 percent¹⁹ and has demonstrated many of the characteristics of healthy growth, including increased unity and prayer, trained leadership, and effective ministry that produces significant social change.

We must never forget that God worked through unknown people in hidden, forgotten neighborhoods to significantly change the face of this city. Paul's description of the people of ancient Corinth could have been said of the people in Boston who were the seeds of the Quiet Revival more than forty years ago:

Think of what you were when you called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world

18 <http://www.prb.org/Educators/TeachersGuides/HumanPopulation/Urbanization.aspx>, accessed January 20, 2012.

19 Based on analysis of data gathered by the Emmanuel Gospel Center, Boston.

to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.²⁰

Just as my human body as a living system operates in the same basic way as Paul's body did, so the living system of my city operates similarly to the living aspect of the first-century cities in which Paul worked. Thus, Boston's Quiet Revival has many parallels to first-century urban Christianity.²¹

In studying this spiritual movement, we realize that no single human endeavor led to the Quiet Revival. God's Spirit and power were undergirding it. While organizations and programs were involved, they did not directly cause it to happen. Rather, the Quiet Revival has been the result of a plethora of complex and interrelated factors from around the world, each building on the other.

When the overall church, the body of Christ, is operating as a healthy organism in a city, it grows the kingdom of God in that city. When we work in living systems, we don't manufacture products; you cannot manufacture a revival. Rather, like farmers, we nurture life in its many complex forms, and in this way, we nurture vitality.

Putting the kingdom of God first

We began this article by talking about how Living System Ministry can give us insights for the systemic problem of waning global revival. One basic characteristic we must remember in working with living social systems is the importance of acknowledging and working within the broader system. We remember we are not the only fish in the sea. Sometimes we get extremely focused on our own projects, programs, or churches (which are all subsystems), and we forget that what we are doing is part of the larger system. In the Apostle Paul's analogy of the church as a human body, we see the body as a whole system and then the hands, eyes, and feet as various subsystems that are inextricably linked to the whole.

In one sense, individual believers are the "hands, eyes, and feet" of our local church systems. But in the larger sense of the universal body of Christ, each of our local churches is a subsystem of that broader expression of the kingdom of God, which is an even larger social/spiritual organism.

Living System Ministry is about putting the whole body—that larger system—first. We cannot just grow our own local church subsystem independently without considering its function in the larger whole. As the Apostle Paul admonished the Ephesian church, we must "grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."²²

When we understand and work in tune with the complex nature of how living things work, we will see the kingdom continue to grow in a city, its region, and the world. We won't be working solely on our own ministries and forgetting the larger system, but, rather, each of our ministries will be nurturing that which grows the kingdom. When this occurs, Christianity can continue to grow rapidly and vitally in our secondary culture as it does in primary cultures.

Finding ways to operate in tune with living systems

Working in tune with the living system can help maintain vitality. At the Emmanuel Gospel Center (EGC) in Boston, where I have served in ministry since 1964, we have been developing and practicing Living System Ministry for decades. This has enabled us to nurture and operate

²⁰ 1 Cor 1:26–29.

²¹ To learn more about the Quiet Revival, see Doug Hall's blog, "How Boston's Quiet Revival Changed the World, and Our Challenge Today" and accompanying video online at www.livingsystemministry.org. Also see *Boston's Book of Acts* (EGC 2002) and *The New England Book of Acts* (EGC 2007) for illustrations of the Quiet Revival in action through the development of its various ethnic streams, online at www.egc.org.

²² Eph 4:16.

in tune with our city's Quiet Revival and its multiple dimensions, which often extend organically to the spiritual vitality in various homelands around the globe. We have learned some ways to nurture Living System Ministry, all of which have caused us to operate in tune with the living physical, social, and spiritual systems around us. Therefore, we offer these suggestions as models for maintaining the vitality of the living social system.

Here are some of the ways we nurture our practice of Living System Ministry at EGC:

1. We keep in focus the essential principles of ministry that we identified as keeping our own organism on a level path that promotes life and fruitfulness.
2. We continually ask questions that help us see the living system dynamics that really do the work of ministry.
3. We recognize and minister through system archetypes²³ that help us “do biblical truth” in today's world.
4. We position ourselves in what we might describe as a “teaching hospital” model, where we are continually both learning and doing ministry in partnership with others.

Identifying our own unique principles of ministry that promote life and fruitfulness

At one point in our history, EGC was in a vital growth period in our ministry. We feared that with growth we would lose the vitality we had, so we asked the question, “What do we not want to lose as we grow?” We identified scores of issues and then, over a process of time, reduced our list to five basic principles that define our unique shape and priorities.²⁴ These are posted around our ministry center, and we consciously refer to them when we make decisions today.

The Principles of Ministry of the Emmanuel Gospel Center, Boston

- **Leading and Timing:** We seek the Lord's leading and timing in making ministry decisions. Our desire is that God direct our steps. We therefore base our ministry decisions on Scripture, praying and seeking God's direction through biblical reflection as an essential part of our decision-making process. As we pray and think about our decisions, we wait until the timing is right and the Lord leads us to move ahead.
- **Relationships:** We seek to build relationships with those to whom and with whom we minister. People reaching out to people is the essence of our ministry. We believe relationships are more important than institutions, programs, or policies. Therefore, we are careful to treat people as people, not as objects of our theories or tactics.
- **Kingdom of God:** We seek to build the Kingdom of God in Boston, not just an individual, group, church, or ministry (including our own). We focus on the unity of the whole Body of Christ in the city and foster its development in whatever ways we can, sharing with others our plans and listening to theirs, designing our ministries so that we are not a threat to other groups, and attempting to support all ministries of Christ in the city.
- **Long Term:** We seek long-term results. We design our programs to produce long-term results rather than the sometimes more gratifying immediate, short-term results which tend to produce long-term unintended negative or counterproductive results.
- **Resources:** We carefully use the resources that the Lord provides. We do not let the availability of resources determine what we do. Rather, after we determine through research, prayer, and the leading and timing of the Spirit what job needs to be done, we trust God to provide the resources to do it, and to lead us to staff, interns, and volunteers

²³ An archetype is a highly stable and universal truth that works across time and space. It can be done in any century as well as in any culture or region, and it consistently results in similar outcomes.

²⁴ Please do not adopt these for your own organization without first going through a process to discover your own unique shape and priorities. Contact the Emmanuel Gospel Center in Boston if you would like help in this area.

who are gifted to do that work. The availability or lack of money is not the main factor in strategic decisions. We choose to take a fiscally conservative approach, not spending money we do not have, and we maintain high standards of fiscal management.

Using these principles enabled us to continually nurture our own vital social subsystem that could drive an effective organizational system.

We ask what we call “system questions” that help us see the living system dynamics

System questions ask, “How does the job get done?” not, “How do we do the job?”

What is the difference? One obvious thing is that “we” are no longer the sole doers! This approach assumes that God is already working in people, and we need to join him, so we ask, “How is it happening?” Let me give some examples of system questions we have asked:

- “How is Christianity in our city planting churches?” instead of, “How do we plant churches?”
- “How can the poor community build its own housing?” instead of “How will we provide housing for the poor?” Our local community was actually in the process of building its own new housing when it helped meet our own need for a building!
- “How can urban ethnic ministry leaders work with a seminary to set up their own urban training school?” This partnership was how Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Boston campus (the Center for Urban Ministerial Education) was founded. It was not simply a matter of the institution coming into the city and setting up the school.
- “How can urban ethnic students recruit their own people to Christian schools?” is a better test of successful ethnic student assimilation in a Christian school than asking, “How can we get more urban ethnic students into our school?”

The trick is to ask questions that produce long-term, multiply productive ends, not questions that produce short-term ends, because most often those short-term returns will end up being counterproductive in the long term.

One way to help overcome the temptation toward short-term results is to ask another system question: “How can what I do be unintentionally counterproductive?” It is so easy to assume the opposite, that, “Whatever I do sincerely will be productive.”

We need to watch for this false mental model. Thinking through how our plans can be unintentionally counterproductive and then devising ways of overcoming that counterproductivity is invaluable in helping us be more effective and productive in ministry. That is why we require all our students to go through this process in writing their ministry proposal papers. So, in whatever ministry endeavor you are planning, try to ask the question in a way that will lead you to think long term, to face long-term counterproductivity, and to work toward multiply productive outcomes.

The intent of these system questions is to get at, “How does the vital social reality, rather than just our own organization, become the primary doer of the task?” In asking the question this way, we are remembering that God has created the larger social reality to do the job. Learning to ask the question this way helps us come into alignment with him and how he has designed his created world to function.

The job is too big for one organization! In saying, “We no longer ask, ‘How do I design my organization to do the task?’” I do not mean that organization and programs are wrong, but that they should be designed by keeping in mind the living dynamics of social systems and how they work. We should always look first at what God is doing and how he is doing it in what is happening in the ministry, and then ask what kinds of programmatic features may need to be incorporated.

Operating from system questions should produce ministry that has increased purity of motive. We are not here to glorify ourselves or our particular organizations, but rather to take our place in the complex process at work in the living social/spiritual system that is doing the major job as the Holy Spirit enables it.

Recognize and minister through system archetypes

We were introduced to the concept of archetypes by studying systems thinking. Senge lists ten basic “systems archetypes”²⁵ which “describe common patterns of behavior” in a system and are “highly effective tools for gaining insight into the behavior of a system.”²⁶ The Bible is filled with archetypes that, once identified, give us insight into how we might “do” the Bible in our modern day. This application is essential in maintaining spiritual authenticity as we face the issue of waning global revival.

Archetypes relate to the very basic and stable ways that living systems work. For example, the human body is a stable reality that has not changed for thousands of years, as was evidenced when doctors studied the 5,300-year-old body of the “ice man” found in the Italian Alps in September 1991.²⁷ Similarly, my doctor would be able to work on Paul’s or Moses’ body if they were alive today because the human body is fairly unchanging in its basic makeup as a living physical system. Social systems, also, are living systems that work in the same basic way now as they have for thousands of years. Even though many differences can be seen between the larger social systems of various time periods, such as between the Middle Ages and our own day, at a very basic level, they are very similar. Many elements of living physical and social systems are typically very stable, and thus the same archetype could be applicable in all of them.

The systems archetypes described by Senge are negative in that they describe how various *problems* in social systems operate. They are diagnostic. One could say they look at the sicknesses of a social system from a systems standpoint and try to see what needs to be done to properly deal with them. Thus, the idea of a “normal state of being” of a social system is helpful in having a guide to its potential healthy state. Also, the terms “sign” and “symptom” are helpful, because often we are dealing with the *symptoms* of problems rather than the problems themselves. The decline of anything, such as a ministry organization or a social system, is a symptom of a problem. The *sign* is what is actually causing the problem, but it is usually not obvious. The sign will tell why.

An archetype yields a very critical understanding in learning how biblical truth happens in our current culture. Since archetypes operate similarly in all periods of history and among all cultures, when we discover an archetype in the Bible, its truth will apply to our own day as it did in biblical times. If we discover an archetype that occurred in the Apostle Paul’s day and see that same archetype occurring in our day, we can use it to live out the truth—we can do the truth of the first century in the twenty-first century. While technology has changed our world dramatically since the first century, the way that living social systems operate has not changed.

At EGC, we have developed and used several archetypes. Probably the first archetype we identified was the “primary and secondary culture social analysis system,” which we have been using since we began teaching urban ministry in 1973. This gave us a useful understanding of cultural dynamics. Living System Ministry has always occurred in the more relational dynamics of primary cultures and certainly we see the Bible permeating relational cultures for the last 2,000 years. But the Bible can also work in our country and culture as well. Biblical truth can be done in our secondary culture social system. If we discover how something was done in the Bible and understand the basic archetype that was used, then as we do the truth in our own day through

25 Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 378–90.

26 William Braun, “The System Archetypes,” 2002, http://www.uni-klu.ac.at/gossimit/pap/sd/wb_sysarch.pdf, 1.

27 Accessed on January 20, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%96tzi_the_Iceman.

that same archetype, we will see similar returns, such as people coming to Christ and churches multiplying. We'll be doing the Bible!

Another archetype that we use extensively is the “social circulatory system of Acts 1:8” through which the gospel moves “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” It shows how cities are significant living systems that produce the growth of the faith in their own regions and the world and then export them to their regions. This happens today the same way it did in the first century. This archetype can be viewed as a huge global set of urban social circulatory systems, with each city as a heart, pumping the lifeblood of relational cultures through the veins and arteries of diaspora movements that reach across the globe.

A third archetype we use we call the Process of the Gospel. When we came to Boston in the 1960s and ministered to the community around us, we began to see lives changed and people coming to the faith. It was incredible! As we realized that the Bible was happening around us, we tried to understand why, and eventually, in 1975, identified a reoccurring pattern—an archetype made up of six steps that we now call the Process of the Gospel, which anyone can do as they minister to individuals, groups, or even a whole city.

The six steps of the Process of the Gospel are Observation, Positive Appreciation, Relevant Communication, Meeting Perceived Needs, Meeting Basic Needs, and Multiplication. Some time later, I realized that these steps described the way that God reached out to us through Jesus Christ, and I began calling them the Process of the Gospel. Briefly, God *observed* our woeful situation; because he *loved* us, he sent his son, who *communicated* relevantly through his parables and teaching, identified and met our *perceived needs* with miracles, and then met our *basic need* through his death and resurrection. Finally, he prepared his disciples for his leaving, laying the groundwork for the birth and *multiplication* of the church made possible through the coming of the Holy Spirit.

We have been using the Process of the Gospel for three decades in many different types of ministries across different cultures, and it has consistently nurtured both initial and long-term fruit. Thus, it can be significant in overcoming the barrier of short-term counterproductivity that we mentioned above.

Continually learning and doing ministry in a “teaching hospital” model

We can gain a lot of understanding about Living System Ministry by thinking how medical professionals, who deal with living systems, work in their social systems. If we think about the characteristics of teaching hospitals, such as their commitment to research, teaching, practitioners who get involved with patients, and so on, we can see some parallels in the ways EGC pursues its ministry.

1. **Applied Research** helps us find out *what* God is doing in the city, and *how* he is doing it.
2. We nurture educational systems and **teach** living systems.
3. **Practitioners** are applying what has been taught and learned through research and practice.
4. **Translational Research** takes what the researchers have discovered and makes it applicable to teachers and practitioners.
5. We are concerned for system-wide health in the larger systems, synonymous, perhaps, with the pursuit of **Public Health** initiatives.

Typically, teaching hospitals embrace public health concerns and people receive training in public health. Here, the teaching hospital tries to keep track of how the health of the entire social system—the whole city—can be nurtured and maintained. From a Living System Ministry standpoint, the concept of “public health” becomes “public spiritual health” and takes the form of constantly trying to understand the state of all the churches in the city and region, the state of Christianity in all the

different denominations and ethnic systems, whether the church broadly has quality control from the standpoint of theological and ministerial education, and more. In other words, “Is the entire kingdom of God consistently growing and maturing over the long term in this city?”

All these elements cannot be done under just one organizational banner. They involve many ministries working with people who are teaching, people who are practitioners, and people who are doing research. The critical question is, “Is there an interrelational element occurring among all of these elements so that the health of God’s kingdom can be nurtured in this particular city or region?”

Living System Ministry calls us to self-limiting and alignment

For any major movement of God to have a long-term history, it must balance “enhancing” with “self-limiting.” Many of the major revivals throughout history began in times of poverty and oppression, just as in the first century as noted in the Book of Acts.²⁸ Boston’s Quiet Revival began at a time when the city was experiencing riots, crime, and poverty. It seems to me that many revivals have begun in these types of environments, followed by substantial spiritual growth in the city.²⁹

However, even as God is blessing and enhancing his people through revival, there comes a point when the revival can either continue to nurture vitality or dramatically decline. Decline often occurs when we step in and exercise our own human power in an attempt to keep the revival going, rather than engaging in the kind of self-limiting behavior that Jesus demonstrated in the incarnation. He “made himself nothing”³⁰ by not using his attributes as God—even though “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form”³¹—and, “being found in appearance as a man . . . humbled himself and became obedient to death . . . on a cross.”³² This humility and self-limitation exercised by Christ challenges those of us with power and wealth to self-limit those resources as the primary way we do ministry. Power and wealth can be used, but they must be integrated into the living system as an outgrowth of how the living social and spiritual system works if they are to produce healthy and lasting fruit.

Redemption was brought into our world by our Savior, who was both God and man. When Jesus came to earth and died on the cross, he chose to limit the use of his divine power and authority. Because of Christ’s obedience in the face of humiliation and suffering, “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.”³³ God calls us to “follow in his steps”³⁴ and “to participate in the sufferings of Christ.”³⁵ We follow Christ in this self-limiting when we submit to God by disciplining ourselves to walk in his ways instead of our ways and by looking to him for guidance as to how we might use the resources entrusted to us.

All the major movements of God in our world today began with a very limiting and humbling process that affected the people involved. Just as the resurrection followed the passion of Christ, spiritual life and vitality exhibited in revival come after humbling and trying circumstances. Similarly, vital “resurrection” life in a spiritual movement can only continue when there is ongoing self-limiting “passion” at its foundation—people choosing to continue to rely on God for every aspect of their sustenance and guidance. Christ calls us to follow his example: to submit to God the things in our power, such as money, technology, etc., that we may try to use to produce spiritual

²⁸ Acts 4, 8.

²⁹ We are speaking here of such revivals as the first-century revival that began with the persecution of the church; Boston’s own Quiet Revival, which began in the chaos of the 1960s; the revival in China, which began in conflict with an atheistic government; the great revival of South Korea, which began after the chaos of the Korean War, while Seoul Korea was almost a vacant lot; and the Nagaland Revival, which began in the chaos of World War II.

³⁰ Phil 2:7.

³¹ Col 2:9.

³² Phil 2:8.

³³ Phil 2:9.

³⁴ 1 Pet 2:21.

³⁵ 1 Pet 4:13; Phil 3:10.

growth in our own strength and innovation. Reliance on that which is within our power turns our assets into our greatest limitations. If we replace the life that God provides with manmade things, we may become rich before men, but we will be in poverty before God, even as Jesus said to the wealthy Laodiceans: “You are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.”³⁶ While redemption turns our liabilities into assets, a focus on human prosperity generated by human strength instead of God’s blessing turns our assets into liabilities.

I am not saying that it is bad or wrong to have resources such as money, technology, structure, and programs in ministry; we actually critically need them. I am saying that our priorities are wrong when we look to those things first. When we prefer our own manmade creations over the living systems that God creates, we will see spiritual decline. But when we limit our human creative power by submitting it to God in order to put first how the living God accomplishes his purpose in his people as the body of Christ, spiritual revivals will continue to grow!

In the Western world, we have a knee-jerk tendency to put our organizational structures (technology, programs, etc.) before our living social systems (the people!). As we work in ministry, living systems must take first priority in our thinking and action. When the living system is given precedence, then the organizational constructs will quietly do their job, and the system will work at its highest potential. But if we put our greatest emphasis, energy, focus, and resources on the constructs, then the living system will not thrive, because it tends to shrivel up when it is not needed.

Without the living system, there is no multiplication, nor long-term fruit. Even if we produce a program that involves two hundred churches, if we have given precedence to the program over the living system, then soon after the program ends, the life will end. The most highly effective organizations are implanted into their vital social systems and are operated by those systems. Using Living System Ministry, we seek to be aligned physically, socially, and spiritually with God’s living systems and to implant our nonliving constructs into his living creations.

Achieving alignment through the redemptive mental model

I want my priorities to be lined up with God’s. However, if I approach ministry with any sense that I am actually able to accomplish the ministry goals in my own strength, or that the ministry I am doing is all about me, or even, “I can solve this problem,” then I have already distanced myself from God.

For me, the best way I have found to keep the right perspective in my thinking so that I do not become unfruitful is to remember that I live in a fallen world. It is that simple. If I start any plan or activity recognizing that things could go drastically wrong despite my best intentions, efforts, and sincerity, then I have placed myself in a position of humility and dependence upon God before I even start to move.

Believing I can be counterproductive leads me to repentance. Repentance is a large factor in learning to keep our priorities aligned with God’s. Peter Senge actually used the New Testament term *metanoia* in describing the importance of repentance in systems thinking.³⁷ We must repent and confess the poverty and weakness of our culture that, even though it is empowered, is poor because of the significant problems it produces. By confessing our poverty, we can begin to deal with some major issues, such as how to help people without hurting them, or how to produce a growing faith in productive ways rather than simply as a wealthy church using its resources. As Christians, we want to work on developing returns that actually nurture God’s kingdom with his wealth over the long term, and not simply be satisfied with building our own kingdoms with our wealth over the short term.

³⁶ Rev 3:17.

³⁷ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 13–14.

The process of repentance is really very practical in ministry. The first step in what I call “the redemptive method” is to acknowledge that we live in a fallen world. When we expect that things could go wrong, we are able to follow a very practical process of repentance that looks like this. We first (1) identify problems when they emerge, and then we can (2) confess and receive forgiveness for the problems we cause, and, finally, (3) repent and find substitute actions that work better in keeping our activities in alignment with the living system nature of the world in which we live.

This redemptive method is also an archetype, because it can be used in any culture and during any time of history. It is an integral part of Living System Ministry.

Our new culture can experience spiritual vitality

The purpose of Living System Ministry is to see an aligned and empowered faith grow vitally in secondary culture. To my understanding, this has never happened before. All the great world revivals were nurtured in the context of primary culture, which has produced a growing faith in the world since the first century. But now, the challenge is for the global revivals to experience spiritual vitality in the burgeoning contemporary secondary culture that is emerging all around them, and Living System Ministry can help with this goal.

In the twentieth century, during the last era of modern missions as the gospel was introduced into relational social systems, it took root and spread very quickly to such an extent that Christianity became a world religion in one generation. All of the major revivals of the past and those now occurring were initially nurtured in the context of socially aligned primary cultures throughout the world.

Our new secondary culture, empowered by man’s technological constructs, has lost its alignment with God’s creations, with his living system design. In fact, as we have become dependent on our own resources and technology, we have seen a decline in Christianity over the years, especially in the Western world.

So where do we reengage our new culture? Contextualizing our faith to the part of our culture that understands how living systems work is how Christianity can grow. While primary culture folk understood living systems at a subconscious level, we in our new secondary culture need to understand living systems both subconsciously and consciously, and for this we need the systemic sciences which can help us overcome our limited capacity of conscious thinking to better understand our very complex world—and not only understand it, but understand how to enter in and bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

Creation’s key characteristic is that it operates as a living reality. The more our sciences begin to define the living nature of the creation, the more they enter into the realm of natural revelation. John Stott encouraged Christians to investigate natural revelation when he said, “God expects and implores us to explore his double revelation in nature and in scripture.”³⁸

As we teach systemic science concepts in our seminary classes, we find that students are having no problem drawing biblical parallels to the mature insights of systems thinking. The systemic sciences are pushing in this direction. The more we contextualize to this developing part of our secondary culture that is gaining a larger understanding of living systems, the more Christianity will be able to operate vitally within our culture.

Developing living system thought

Subconscious processing of complexity has existed through all of human history, but the strategically new way of *consciously* processing complexity through the systemic sciences can make

38 J. P. Moreland, *Love your God with All your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 62, quoted by Roy McCaughy in “Basic Stott,” *Christianity Today*, January 8, 1996, 32.

possible the unifying of our often fragmented contemporary culture. Here are six contributions that the systemic sciences can make to our understanding of God's living systems:

1. The systemic sciences help us understand how a complex reality—like a church or even a whole city—actually works as a total interrelated, interdependent vital system.
2. Practitioner-oriented, they close the gap between the practitioner and the scholar that has existed since the earliest developments of philosophy.³⁹
3. They unify conscious and subconscious thought processes. Previously, conscious thought fragmented our world and subconscious thought unified it, but now these sciences enable our conscious thought to process complexity in ways similar to the subconscious.
4. They produce interdisciplinary sciences by constantly nurturing an interrelationship of all the sciences, which had previously been separated from each other.
5. They nurture proper implanting of technology into our creation, a living system reality.
6. They are tools that help us more properly “read” natural revelation so that what we learn can be better transplanted into our understanding of special revelation.

Systemic sciences are moving in the right direction. Since living systems seem to be able to infinitely interrelate, and the systemic sciences are increasingly enabling us to better see the three realms of reality (physical, social, and spiritual) operating as living systems, we can more fully understand how these three realms can interrelate *with each other* and produce an increasingly unified view of our world. Thus, we now seek to apply systemic or living system approaches in the spiritual as well as the physical and social realms.

Systemic approaches developed first physically, then socially, and finally spiritually. Conscious systemic approaches began with the physical sciences. Being practitioner-oriented, they produced practical results in many fields in our contemporary culture, such as medical science, engineering, physics, and ecology. Then, during the last century, a whole panorama of systemic social sciences developed and are continuing to emerge that enable us to better deal with systemic social problems. Now, through Living System Ministry, the spiritual realm can be seen systemically.

As we continue to develop Living System Ministry, I am looking forward to seeing where it will take us. First, I expect that we will relate more to cutting-edge systemic sciences through closer relationships to major universities where these disciplines, with their unifying effect that even extends to faith and science, are growing. Secondly, I want to see the church using new tools from the systemic sciences to more clearly define natural revelation in ways that agree and interrelate with special revelation. Third, it is my hope that, as Boston's Quiet Revival nears its fiftieth year, we can see how Living System Ministry can continue to contextualize the revival to the new, more vital part of our secondary culture so that a growing faith will mature. And last, I would like to see the church in Boston nurture a comprehensive strategy, similar to that of a teaching hospital: It would build on the interrelationship of applied research, translated for the practitioner and teaching fields, and would feed into a system-wide, “public health” approach, demonstrating how a broad system of vital Christianity actually grows and produces fruit over the long term.

³⁹ The earliest philosophers who laid the intellectual groundwork for this civilization were not practitioner-oriented. Technology is about what man did and made, but, according to technology guru Kevin Kelly, “Aristotle's coinage ‘technology’ [speaking of the *‘techne’* (craft) of rhetoric (*logos*)] was abandoned after classical times to the footnotes of obscure texts.” Actually, what we do in the physical world now has the name “technology.” But Western culture did not give it that name until James Bigelow wrote *The Elements of Technology* in 1829. Accessed on January 20, 2012, http://www.kk.org/thetechnium/archives/2004/11/the_name_of_wha.php.

An integrated, interrelated, and applied theology is needed

Theologians must be challenged to speak to all the issues we have mentioned here. I think that, as we pay attention to the truths revealed in natural revelation—truths that our secular counterparts in academia and science are also discovering—our theology will be more relevant to our new cultural context and more suitable to producing something practical and world changing. Theology should not just be about truths that we simply know but do not do in practical ways! I always ask my students the question, “If truth is not telling you what to do, then what is?” God’s truth should tell us how to deal with the problems of our day. Theology should again be the king of sciences, not something that is seen as unrelated to the practical world.

Theology can and will be the basis for finding answers for the unthinkable huge problems in our world, as well as addressing the challenge of growing our faith in this extraordinarily needy world and its new nonaligned culture. However, such a theology must be rooted in the totality of all of God’s revelation, from what the physical world says about its Creator, to the written word of God, to the living Word who is Christ.

Growing up to maturity in Christ

Jesus had a physical body like yours and mine, but he totally interrelated that physical body within his personhood as God. He was God and man. He represented within himself the idea that the spoken and written word is also the living Word, that truth is living truth, and that redemption is not only about you and me receiving forgiveness and salvation, but the eternal salvation and redemption of all of creation. All of it is going to be redeemed. We have been saved through a redemption that is going to redeem the entire creation!

As we learn to practice Living System Ministry, we realize we are only part of the whole system of what God is doing. We seek to uncover where our culture has life, nurture that life, and see it become ignited by God’s special revelation. As contemporary Christianity contextualizes to the aligned elements of secondary culture—the aspects of the culture that are working in tune with the living systems of the created world in which God has placed us—then Christianity can again find its growing edge in our world!

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The Cat & the Toaster

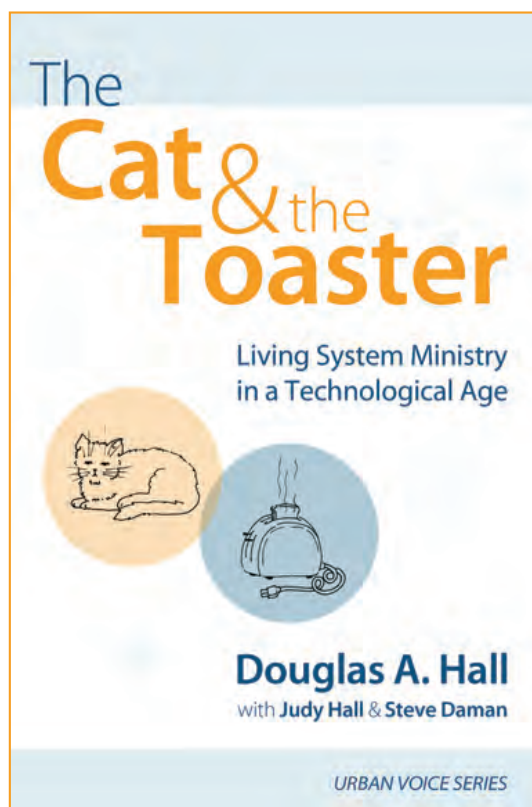
Living System Ministry in a Technological Age **Douglas A. Hall** with Judy Hall & Steve Daman

Living system ministry is an approach to Christian ministry in the Western world that recognizes the differences between *cats*, the world God created, and *toasters*, the world we create using our technology and our capacities, limited as they are.

The church is the Body of Christ, a living system. Neighborhoods, cities, and cultures, too, are complex and interrelated living social systems. Why, then, would we try to do God's work in a church or social system using tools and methods designed for non-living systems? We do it because our culture is very organizationally—and technologically—centered. We have grown accustomed to thinking of our social contexts not as living systems, but as things we can easily measure and control.

Embracing both perspective and procedure, Living System Ministry is about doing better ministry by seeing a better picture of what exists in the total system. Like farmers, rather than technicians, we learn to be involved in and to be “in tune with” what causes fruitfulness. We never cause fruit to happen. God does! But as our work becomes better aligned with what God is already doing in his complex, living-system environment, there is an explosion of life. We discover the fruit that remains.

Writing from his forty-five years of experience as an urban ministry practitioner in Boston, Dr. Doug Hall introduces us to an approach to missions that recognizes the lead role of God's larger, living social systems as powerful engines for doing far more in our world than we can even begin to imagine.



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Don't Let your Organization Kill your Movement

Nika Elugardo

Living System Ministry is a recognition and understanding that God's creation—that is, humans and life—operates according to principles of health and growth, and life and death that no one but God can control. Like living physical systems, social systems work in a similar way. When a living social system is failing, the best that a person or organization can do to intervene is to recognize how the system would naturally heal and then to nurture that healing. When a living system is thriving, it cannot be contained. It can only be nurtured, like a plant or like a child.

Social movements are living systems. Comprised of people, groups, and human institutions, the array of complex interactions is vast, infinite, and completely outside of human control. Like any actor in a living system, an organization that wants to engage a social movement must recognize its own counterproductivity; understand and align its actions to the complex design, needs, and momentum of the social system; and rely on the rich resources within the system to guide and correct the organization's behavior. Organizations that try to resist this reality will, at best, become irrelevant and, at worst, will drain the life out of a social movement until it dies.

Characteristics of movements¹

A movement is a semi-coordinated culture shift that moves the individuals and groups within a social order from one way of thinking about and approaching a situation to another. A movement requires broad participation across socioeconomic and geographic groups in order to accomplish its mission and relies on cross-sector participation and cooperation. A critical mass and cross-section of society work together for change.

Examples of modern movements abound and include the movement to end human trafficking. Perhaps among the oldest of movements, anti-trafficking recently has seemed to gain universal recognition as a worthy cause. The movement to end systemic poverty through financial education and asset development has been building momentum for decades, but arguably has yet to take root worldwide. Recent years have witnessed grassroots initiatives explode into a movement to end corruption in politics and business, as citizens from many nations rise up in protest against injustice and criminality in the vastly unequal distribution of rights and wealth.

Movements resist being organized

In an era when nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) saturate the social change market, organizations often expect to take the lead in “managing” movements, bridling their momentum and riding them to victory. Somehow, this model does not seem to work. Despite organizational efforts to generate, or worse, control movements by assigning them leadership and making them part of their fundraising campaigns, agency-led movements die.

Movements are social organisms, made up of people and groups of people, not mechanical components that can be controlled—at least not without draining the creative life and energy from them. This does not, however, mean that movements are impossible to guide or to lead. In fact, movements without any coordinated leadership can be left to mob rule and, as a result, meander, be misguided, or even become dangerous. Lean organizations can become an essential part of helping

¹ The observations in this article are generated from my own experience in various consulting roles in which I have engaged over the years. Because of the sensitive nature of the consulting relationship, I have refrained from documenting these observations with the many specific examples that have led me to the conclusions expressed here.

to guide movements away from their inherently spontaneous and combustible nature and toward a long-term and sustainable shift in culture. The leadership of a movement, however, must think and operate differently than that of a traditional organization if it is going to nurture, rather than kill, the movement it joins.

Movements depend on the outward-focused energy of participants

In Maharashtra, India, more than two dozen anti-trafficking NGOs gathered in June 2011 to strategize how to work together. As in any living system, if the individual parts are not aware of each other, they can unknowingly work against each other, producing change that damages the work of the other. Perhaps no system demonstrates the danger of this as well as a local anti-trafficking network. In the anti-trafficking movement, legal advocates seek to put behind bars the very women that doctors and public health advocates try to protect: madames.

Because a movement is defined in part by diverse groups creating change together, the individual goals and mission of participants inextricably intertwine with the broader movement's mission. The movement's mission, whether implied or expressly articulated, may be vague in its terms, such as "root out corruption wherever it may be," or more specific, such as "end child sex trafficking." In either case, a movement will gain momentum only to the extent that participants meet their individual needs by engaging the mission of the movement. Otherwise, no individual would have incentive to participate.

At the same time, individuals must submit their own goals to the larger, even if ambiguous, mission of the movement. Otherwise, participants will work at cross purposes with further-reaching goals, dismantling the movement. A movement can only grow when participants understand and respond to the collective mission as the primary avenue for furthering their personal interests. This is essentially because invested individuals must "staff" a movement, even if none of them receives direct compensation for working on the collective mission.

At the gathering in Maharashtra, facilitators used a systems analysis strategy called hexagoning to help participating organizations map out their collective mission and locate their individual missions within it. In the hexagoning process, each member of a session writes the values, problems, initiatives, and outcomes they see operating within the system—in this case, the sex-trafficking system—on a series of sticky hexagons. The facilitator helps participants fit the hexagons together in clusters that show how these individual processes interrelate, either in reinforcing or counterbalancing ways. This process helped, for example, the legal advocates to see how their well-defined strategy of taking out the middleman (or woman, to be precise) could potentially undo the doctor's equally well-defined strategy of befriending the madames to gain access to victims of HIV, abuse, and dangerously unregulated underground health care.

Organizational participants in a movement must follow the same principles that natural persons follow in order to make a movement successful. This means that organizations, like individuals, submit their missions to the collective movement. Regardless of the content of an organization's mission statement, its operating mission—that is, the mission and projected outcomes that the organization empirically organizes around—must align with the goals and mission of the movement. In the above example, public health doctors and lawyers who previously could only see their missions as in competition began the difficult creative process of learning how to limit their own work in ways that would facilitate the work of the other.

Characteristics of organizations

Inward focus

Traditionally, organizations, especially nonprofits, focus their energies on funding the ideas and initiatives they design internally. They identify problems within the scope of their mission and

try to raise resources to solve those problems. An organization is considered successful if its own programs grow in number and in size.

In addition to this inward focus in mission and program planning, traditional organizations view resources as scarce and finite. As a result, they compete with potential partners in hopes of winning and controlling the resources before other organizations are able to do so. A traditional organization counts it success if it is the first to get copious grant funds to run its programs and implement its ideas.

By contrast, a movement is inspired by participants who focus on the needs, requests, and solutions provided by members of the community who are not on payroll. For a movement to succeed, participants must rely on nontraditional resources that they share with others, such as in-kind contributions of time, skill, and space. Additionally, there must be avenues for developing and expanding the pool of resources through training, resource mapping, collaboration, and coordination.

Traditional organizations don't like movements. Movements seem chaotic. No one is in charge. It is difficult to measure interim success. Most distastefully, no single organization receives the credit for success, but everyone is diminished by failure.

Traditional organizations drain energy from a movement rather than energize it.

The traditional "survival of the fittest" approach to programming and funding drains movement resources without replenishing them beyond what is necessary to justify and fund organizational programs. This Darwinist mentality induces organizations to take self-centered actions that suffocate the life in the movement if that life is being expressed outside the organization. This happens in five key areas: leadership, mission development, programming, resource raising, and innovative decision making.

Leadership: Organizations typically hire the best leaders they can find to staff predetermined roles for preset programming. The organization positions these leaders as elite experts in the field addressed by the organization's programs. However, when an elite group takes charge in a movement, strong leaders from outside the "lead organization" lose or decline opportunities to express their gifts in ways that benefit the movement but require allegiance to the ostensible leader. Because elite leadership maintains a perceived advantage in decision making and resource raising, this model stifles emerging leaders and turns off potential partners who might otherwise collaborate to advance the collective mission.

Mission: Organizations typically draft a mission statement and decline to do any work that does not fit neatly within it. However, no single organizational mission statement or work plan can encompass the dynamic vision of the diverse groups comprising a movement. This is especially true if the organization's mission development is rigid and nonresponsive to external influence.

Programming: Traditional organizations design programs and then find staff to run them. This is the least efficient form of problem solving. It drains bright leaders from the community and sets them to work on predefined solutions that often require enormous resources for limited, ambiguous, or short-term returns. By contrast, the activities of a movement must follow the momentum and talent of the participants.

Resources: The typical organization is highly motivated to self-preserve, which often entails drawing all available resources to itself and away from others. Organizations also prefer to stockpile their resources at the beginning of the year, conservatively meting out resources until a carefully planned budget has been expended. The "successful" organization dominates control of its resources and parsimoniously funnels them to the public. This promotes an inefficient use of collective resources when, as is often the case, the organizations that fundraise best do not possess the skills, knowledge, or sensitivity to use the funds as effectively as other movement participants.

Innovation: Organizations typically want to predict outcomes and minimize chaos and disharmony. Thus, they most often partner with like-minded organizations that share compatible aims. Staff, wary of risk taking and fearful of losing their jobs, decline uncertain opportunities and collaborations, even when they could lead to creative discovery. Movements, by contrast, often thrive on the dynamic tensions between discordant views of change. Innovative solutions arise out of collaborations between unlikely partners. Efforts to either remain insulated or to build powerful but homogenous coalitions can choke this creative innovation.

How a lean organization can energize a movement

While large nonprofits with expansive, high-powered boards of directors and enormous budgets and staff may be doomed to ineffectiveness at inspiring or nurturing movements, lean organizations can engender the flexibility to respond to a movement's needs. Smaller or newer organizations often rely more on interrelationship and entrepreneurial risk taking in order to make creative use of resources. Unlike established large organizations, leaner counterparts can respond more naturally to the organically flowing and highly relational chaos that makes movements grow. In fact, when wisdom, humility, and responsiveness govern action taking, lean organizations can be key to institutionalizing the positive change inspired by movements.

Wisdom: Strategically directing energy toward the highest yield in outcomes

In an environment where “funding seems to be drying up,” it is easy for organizational leaders to put more and more energy toward getting money in the door to pay for capital and operational expenditures. This approach may be necessary for program-driven organizations with a lot of paid staff. Movement-driven organizations, on the other hand, must be careful to staff and operate in ways that leverage all resources, including staff resources, directly into the outcomes required by the movement. This could necessitate using volunteers from the movement to provide leadership and to implement vision, sometimes resulting in an uncomfortable blending of operations and services.

While a traditional organization enforces a clear division between internal operations, such as staff support, and programming and services—outward-directed activities—a movement-oriented organization will maintain flexibility about this. Leaders determine all staffing and activities based on which resources produce the highest outcomes, or change, in the participants of the movement. Any qualified person in or out of the organization, including volunteers or partners from other institutions and civil society, can be expected to perform any role.

In 2008, individuals appointed from the public, nonprofit, and corporate sectors to the Massachusetts Asset Development Commission (MADC) learned from their work together that lack of access to financial education prevents residents in every income group from saving money and building assets. The nation's historic financial crisis motivated each sector to combine their resources and together to creatively address the problems of poverty and diminishing wealth. Thus, even after the MADDC completed its legislatively mandated report and disbanded, the former commissioners continued to voluntarily convene as a steering committee to strategize how to improve the delivery of financial education services to every resident in the state, regardless of age or income. Recognizing that no one sector or cluster of organizations could solve a problem that impacts every Commonwealth resident, the steering committee formed the Massachusetts Financial Education Collaborative (MFEC) to coordinate the efforts of private institutions, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations to help residents, rich and poor, “build wealth on knowledge.”

The three-year-old MFEC launched its central office in December 2011. A lean staffing model forces a reliance on volunteers to activate dormant energy and resources from the movement. The MFEC paid staff carefully evaluates operations to make sure each internal activity produces an external outcome or partnership. Accordingly, the central office leadership is training and

supporting the volunteer steering committee in integrating internal operations, such as member development and fundraising, and with external services, such as workshop development and public awareness campaigning. Structuring operations to take advantage of this dynamic is enabling the central office to quickly grow an infrastructure while energizing, rather than draining or dominating, the broader movement's resources.

Humility: Recognizing the power of invisible leadership

Leaders and organizations that serve without credit and take direction from the momentum of the movement empower the movement to continue without them. This kind of sustainability orientation is key to movement-oriented leadership. Organizations that are able to sacrifice notoriety in exchange for higher overall outcomes invite participation by incredibly talented and motivated members of the movement and unleash the power of meaningful collaboration.

Often, organizations associate being unknown or behind the scenes with getting the short end of the stick, but there is more than one way to be invisible. A stealth plane, for instance, is no wallflower. Stealth power expands the territory without imposing a threat and invites broad engagement. Organizational ego will drain a system of talent, even while short-term cues may lull the superstar organization, and even others in the movement, into mistaking the dominance of its brand with success. The individual leader, organization, and mission must all give way to the greater good: collaborative leadership, shared vision, and collective ownership.

Responsiveness to the environment

Continuous internal and external assessment enables wise and flexible organizations to respond to reality rather than to vision alone, and to what is working rather than to mere intuition or off-base desires. Mapping needs and resources, as well as analyzing the gaps in services, helps the savvy organization avoid misdirecting energy into futile efforts to generate the movement or its momentum, rather than responding to the sometimes hidden vitality already present in an emergent movement. Responsive organizations reinvent their mission and strategically realign activities according to what they learn, stimulating growth inside and outside the organization while preventing wasted resources.

A healthy movement will reward outward-focused organizations

The beauty of a movement is that it boasts at least as many resources as individuals and groups. These resources, often latent and undervalued, grow with careful attention and investment. Motivated individuals and organizations can be nurtured into resources that provide volunteer staffing, make valuable connections, and increase access to new laborers and investors.

In arguably the most corrupt region of one of the developing world's fastest emerging economies, a new political party (which will remain anonymous to protect its work) is training more than 140 indigenous leaders to run for local elected office on a platform of justice reform and anticorruption. In this region, more than 50 percent of the local elected officials have serious criminal records, including offenses such as kidnapping and homicide. Officials systematically buy votes or coerce them through violence. Leadership of the new party looked to big-name national players who shared the party's specific agenda to affirm their mission and sponsor their courageous initiatives.

This strategy helped the party gain notoriety initially, but ultimately the party found their training efforts stalled as they awaited guidance from busy, cautious, and well-connected individuals. When the party organization returned to its roots, identifying and supporting highly motivated indigenous people in providing leadership and, admittedly, more modest resources, they regained momentum and were able to mobilize effective and incredibly diverse partners from across the region and throughout the diaspora.

Investing in others by understanding their vision for and their place in the broader movement—helping them do their dreams more effectively—creates a healthy interdependence. Resources who do not form the cast of usual suspects, such as the more unassuming individuals in whom the party ultimately invested, depend on the movement-oriented organization to provide infrastructure and coordination support. They also return the investment by partnering to get the work of the movement done and by attracting new contributors from their vast networks.

Organizational leaders often fear that focusing outward, leading without credit, and looking to external sources for direction and volunteer staffing will cause the more traditional funders and investors to overlook them. It is counterintuitive that empowering and recognizing efforts outside the organization can attract resources to the organization. Fortunately, however, the bandwagon effect will draw many image-conscious investors into the mix. In the example above, the big players did invest after the party plugged into the broader movement and its momentum became unstoppable. Counter to intuition, if the party had focused on validating its own existence, as opposed to its priceless contribution to others in the movement, its training initiative may never have grown to encompass leaders from every socioeconomic sector.

In the U.S., the nonprofit sector typically looks to foundations and large private philanthropists for money. In such a context, the fear of being overshadowed by competing organizations that invest more in self-recognition and sexy endorsements is reasonable, but transparency and discipline in reporting can effectively guard against this. Happily, many contemporary funders do not look exclusively to flashy marketing or expensive outputs (products and services) to determine the value of their investment decisions. They follow the outcomes, or changes in the people and groups engaging with the organization. If an organization assesses and demonstrates outcomes effectively, it will not need to plaster its name on glossy billboards. Strong funders recognize that an organization that mobilizes others and makes them more effective powerfully multiplies the funders' return on investment. The balance sheets and outcomes assessment report will create visibility by telling the true story of who did the work.

It is particularly important for organizations to demonstrate the value of intentional invisibility by tracking and reporting the outcomes that flow specifically from this approach. Stealth technology makes a fighter jet more effective and powerful. That is why investors will commit millions on top of the cost of a normal plane in order to ensure effective stealth functionality. Organizations are similar. Funders will pay for an organization's efforts to remain behind the scenes when those efforts cause a demonstrated increase in outcomes.

A healthy outward-focused organization will help nurture a movement into perpetuity.

Movements need organizations, but organizations must support movements rather than attempt to control them. Evolved organizations that are willing to outgrow traditional organizational roles can nurture a movement rather than draining it.

- Leaders serve a bigger mission and equip others, even outside the organization, for leadership, rather than accumulate resources and notoriety for their own organization.
- The mission evolves in response to data on what the movement needs.
- Programming does not drive staffing, but rather is determined by the momentum and volunteer base provided by the movement.
- Resources are creatively discovered, developed, and leveraged for the movement and not primarily for the organization.
- Innovation is stimulated by a culture that supports and rewards healthy risk taking and lesson-producing failure.

These principles, and others that help an organization think and act organically, can activate the

latent leadership and resource potential within a movement. The result: a symbiotic relationship between the movement and its collaborating organizations that lasts until the movement's mission is accomplished.

Nika Elugardo is the Director of the Massachusetts Financial Education Collaborative and also volunteers as a consultant with the Emmanuel Gospel Center's Abolitionist Network, which fights human trafficking in the U.S. and beyond. She volunteers as a lawyer with the International Consortium for Law and Development, which equips legislators, ministry officials, civil society participants, university faculty, and development professionals to solve social problems with effective law. It is in these capacities that Nika has engaged with the three movements highlighted in this article.

Preparing Urban Scholar Practitioners

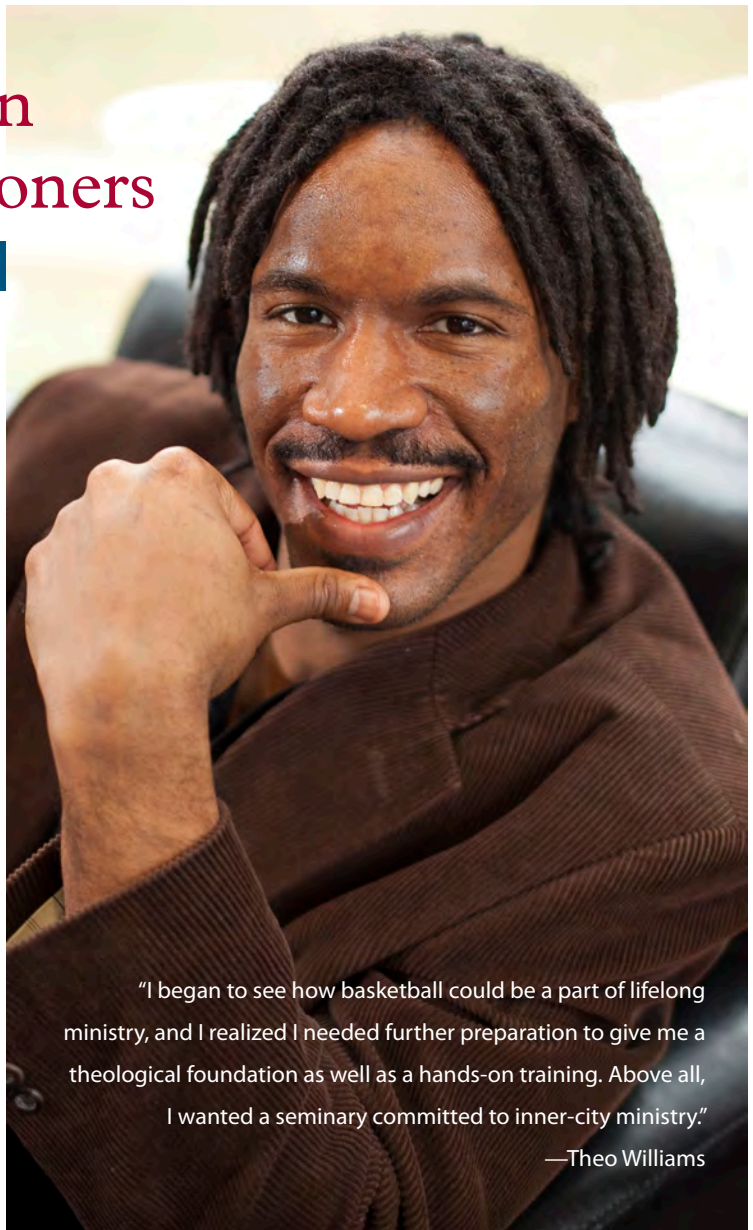
THEO WILLIAMS

Theo Williams grew up playing basketball, dreaming he'd play professionally someday. But as Theo entered college, God used a series of injuries to change his priorities. He began to coach, using basketball to reach inner city youth for Jesus Christ.

Theo enrolled in the Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME), the Boston campus of Gordon-Conwell. While at CUME, Theo co-founded and served as president of Antioch, Inc., a nonprofit committed to reconciliation, assisted in the planting of a church and honed his poetry skills. Upon graduating in 2004 with a Master of Arts in Urban Ministry, Theo and his wife Nicole spent a year in Jamaica mentoring youth through sports and music.

Theo currently works at Bethel College in Mishawaka, Indiana, as Associate Professor of Communication, as well as the Faculty Coordinator for the Center for Intercultural Development.

Whether teaching speech, conducting multicultural youth ministry, recording a spoken-word album, or starting a new church, Theo is integrating what he learned in the classroom and through his experiences at CUME.



"I began to see how basketball could be a part of lifelong ministry, and I realized I needed further preparation to give me a theological foundation as well as a hands-on training. Above all, I wanted a seminary committed to inner-city ministry."

—Theo Williams

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Whole World, Whole Gospel, Whole Church: A Systemic Understanding of God's Mission

Bobby Bose

The Lausanne Congress adopted its name from Lausanne, Switzerland, where the first Congress was held. Led by Billy Graham and British evangelical statesman John Stott, 2,300 Christian leaders from 150 countries strategized to reach the whole world with the gospel. In that 1974 event, the Congress popularized a slogan within the evangelical world: “Evangelization requires the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.” This slogan continues to be the main theme of the Lausanne Congress thirty-seven years later, and from it I have drawn the title of this article.

I attended Cape Town 2010: The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization as one of the 400 participants from the United States and as one of the 4,000 participants from 200 nations and territories of the world—where I connected with many representatives from the United States, United Kingdom, India, Bangladesh, Ghana, Nigeria, Malaysia, Finland, Germany, etc. We delegates were present at Cape Town to wrestle with the challenges we, the global church, face in Christian ministry and to call the whole church to a fresh proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that we, the church, might be better equipped as “his witnesses” in every aspect of society in the twenty-first century. Here, of course, the reference to “his witnesses” comes from Acts 1:8, where Jesus said, “and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The preparation for Lausanne III began more than three or four years ago and, for U.S. participants, ended with a follow-up meeting in April 2012. Jarvis C. Ward on behalf of the Mission America Coalition wrote in an invitation letter, “Our purpose is to bring together hundreds of US leaders to reflect on and pray fervently for our country and the world, trusting the Holy Spirit to strategically lead the Body of Christ as we humbly seek to ‘serve better together’ in advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed in 2010–2020. . . . Together we can do more than any of us can do alone.”

Two thousand years after our Lord's first advent to the earth, Christianity has become a global faith. God is at work mightily in this world and he is accomplishing his mission of loving and saving this world *through* his people, the church universal. It would be a fitting outcome of this article if we not only became aware of the global reality of Christian ministry, but also became systemically intentional and began to engage in a process of conversation with the global church until we can sing Revelation 5:9–10:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth;

or until we can visualize Revelation 7:9–10:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.

This is the goal of God's global mission and ministry: the worship of God and his Son Jesus Christ by multitudes of humanity from every ethnolinguistic people group. And the point of the slogan I mentioned earlier is that, since 1974, the Lausanne Congress of World Evangelization believes that it will take the whole church to take "the whole gospel to the whole world." In other words, God intends to use the whole body of Christ for taking the whole gospel to every corner of the whole world to accomplish Christ's mission.

Therefore, in order to have a forward-looking heavenly vision into the future of the book of Revelation, we need to have some clear understanding of these three "wholes" of the church, the gospel, and the world. I would like to retrace our steps and change the order of these three "wholes" and look back to the beginning before we begin to think about the process by which the whole church should take the whole gospel to the whole world. Let us go back to Genesis and see how the whole world began in the first place.

Whole world

Genesis 1 and 2 give us a glimpse of how God designed and created the whole world into a fascinating ecological system with everything connected and related to one another. What we have is an interconnected and interrelated, balanced solar system in which all the planets, like Earth, placed in their own orbits, go around the sun, and then there is the beautiful moon, a natural satellite that goes around the Earth in its own orbit. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), an agency of the United States government responsible for the civilian space program and aeronautics research, says of the moon, "Our Moon makes Earth a more livable planet by moderating our home planet's wobble on its axis, leading to a relatively stable climate, and creating a rhythm that has guided humans for thousands of years."¹ This shows that everything in God's created solar system works like a well-designed and well-oiled dynamic living system—just like a human body works. Similarly, God also created every species of living creatures, birds, fish, insects, and animals to fill the earth, and God saw that it was good. Finally, God completed this fine ecological system by creating human beings in his own image and blessed them and said:

"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." . . .

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food."²

God created human beings in his own image and asked them to increase in numbers and to enjoy and take care of this God-created ecological system as his stewards or vice-regents on earth. But then, the events of Genesis 3 happened, which not only affected the human race, but the whole system of creation. The Apostle Paul, just like Apostle John in Revelation, writes with the great eschatological hope in the midst of his present anguish:

The *creation* waits in eager expectation...For the *creation* was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the *creation* itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole *creation* has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.³

1 National Aeronautics and Space Administration, "Earth's Moon: Overview," accessed 4 May 2012, <http://solarsystem.nasa.gov/planets/profile.cfm?Object=Moon>.

2 Gen 1:26, 27; 9:6.

3 Rom 8:19–22, emphasis added.

As you may know, God did not wait long. In Genesis 3:15b, God promised the way through which he was going to redeem the whole world, the whole creation, and the whole ecological system. He said the seed or offspring of the woman would crush the serpent's head and the serpent would strike his heel, and that is what happened at the cross when Jesus our Savior and Lord was crucified. But this redemption of the whole creation entailed a long, systemic process from the beginning, following from the calling of Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, when God promised to bless him and bless all nations or peoples of the whole world through him. And even though Jesus Christ, Abraham's promised descendant, has finished/completed this task of blessing all of humanity through his death and resurrection, the systemic process of realizing this blessing by all peoples of the whole world is still continuing today, despite the confusion of Abraham's immediate natural descendants. Beginning with Isaac and Jacob and continuing with others after them, over and over through the Old Testament, they misunderstood this promise of blessing for them and thought that they were God's favorite, specially chosen people. They wanted to keep the blessing only for themselves and not share it with the rest of the world.

To highlight the unwillingness of God's chosen people in the Old Testament to fulfill Abraham's calling, let us specifically consider how Jonah did not want to share the blessing with the people of the great city of Nineveh. Of course, to be fair to Jonah, compared to many other Old Testament examples, Jonah had every good reason to have behaved the way he did. At that time, Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was the symbol of the power and threat of Assyria toward Jonah's nation, Israel. To Jonah at that time, Nineveh was the worst of all enemies that Israel could have, so Jonah was hoping that God would destroy the enemy city of Nineveh and all of its residents according to the words that God had asked him to prophesy against it. God said to Jonah, "Go to the Great City of Nineveh and preach against it," and then again, "Go to the Great City of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."⁴ And what was the message that Jonah had to proclaim? "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."⁵ Nineveh will be destroyed. Now, if Jonah really hated his arch-enemy Assyria and the city of Nineveh as a symbol of its evil imperialist power, why on earth would he run away to Tarshish? Strange, is it not? The answer is that Jonah was a prophet. He knew God's true intention, and he did not share it:

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

But the Lord replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"⁶

That is the issue. We and Jonah do not have any right to be angry toward God about whom he wants to bless and forgive, because we do not deserve the blessings with which God has blessed us. Through Abraham, we and Jonah have received unmerited favor so that whole world may be blessed. Jonah was angry because the vine that provided him shade withered:

But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"⁷

How often we hear of people saying that the God of the Old Testament is the God of war, violence, and vengeance as opposed to the God of the New Testament, who is God of love and peace. But

⁴ Jonah 1:2; 3:2.

⁵ Jonah 3:4.

⁶ Jonah 4:1–4.

⁷ Jonah 4:10–11.

that is not how Jonah son of Ammittai from Gath Hephher understood God. To him, the God of the Old Testament was the “gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love.” And that is why Jonah wanted to go to Tarshish, to go as far as he could in the opposite direction than God had sent him. But God said he is concerned about the pagan city Nineveh, and he calls it “that great city.” He is as concerned about unbelieving pagans as about his chosen people.

Right after the book of Jonah in the canon of Scripture is the book of Micah, the prophet whose name means, “who is like the Yahweh, the Lord ?” Micah makes a wordplay on his name when he asks, “who is a God like you?” And the obvious answer is God is merciful. God, “who pardons sin, forgives the transgression . . . You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.”⁸

Later on, the prophet Jeremiah wrote from Jerusalem to the exiles in pagan Babylon in 29:7, “Seek the *shalom* of the city,” meaning peace, prosperity, welfare, and wholeness of the city of Babylon, instructing them to “Pray for it for in its *shalom*, you too will have *shalom*.” Contrast this message with that of the prophets Ahab son of Kolaiah, Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, and Shemaiah the Nehelamite, who lied to the people in exile and wanted them to escape from Babylon. Once again, we see that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the whole world.

On the other hand, in the New Testament, even when the God of love, Jesus Christ, came to earth, he found much of the same narrowminded ethnocentrism and selfishness among his own people. So, with a whip in his hand,⁹ he cleansed the Jerusalem temple, speaking these words in Mark 11:17 (quoting Isa 56:7): “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” Here, we see that God is the God of all nations, and that the Jerusalem temple was supposed to be “the house of prayer for all nations.” That is why John 3:16 proclaims, “For God so loved the world,” meaning that God so loved the *whole* world, not just Jewish people or Western European people, but peoples from all over the world. That is what has been happening for the last 2,000 years: Christianity has become a global faith. In the individualistic culture of the Western world, we can look at John 3:16 and think, “For God so loved *me* that he gave his one and only son *for me*.” And, while that is true, and many people in this world do personally accept the Lord Jesus in that way, at some point, we have to see from God’s global perspective that God so loved *the whole world* that he sent his Son for the whole world. God loves the whole world in the same way he loves you and me. Quite often, patriotic Americans say, “God bless America,” and that prayer may be appropriate at certain times of national concern, as long as it is not guided by ethnocentrism or a selfish desire that God *only* bless America or Americans. God loves all peoples on earth, and he wants to bless all peoples on earth; *that is why he sent his one and only Son*. This is what God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, and the coming of Jesus to this earth is the fulfillment of that promise. We cannot selfishly enjoy that promise just for ourselves, but must let the whole world know that Jesus is Lord.

Jacques Ellul (1912–1994), renowned French sociologist cum theologian in the latter half of the twentieth century, was interested in the seeing big picture before assessing his immediate issue or context within that whole. Quite often, the slogan “Think globally, act locally” is ascribed to him, and, even if he may not have originated this idea, he definitely made it very popular. Perhaps we need to grasp hold of this concept, too, to understand the whole world first before we serve in our local contexts. We need to “think globally” first before or as we “act locally.” May God help us!

The whole gospel

Our theme is the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. We first traced our steps backward to understand the whole world. Next, we have to examine what it means to

⁸ Micah 7:18.

⁹ John 2:15.

take the *whole gospel* to the whole world. We saw before that, after creating everything good and beautiful, God created human beings in his own image and blessed them. The sociocultural and ecological mandates that God gave to human beings in Genesis 1 and 2, “to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth,” and to be stewards of the ecosystem that God provided, did not vanish with the fall in Genesis 3. In Genesis 9, after the flood, God gave the same command again to Noah and his sons: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth.” God continues:

“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you *and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth*. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

And God said, “*This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come*: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember *my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind*. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

So God said to Noah, “*This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.*”¹⁰

After the flood, God not only established a covenant with Noah and his sons and, through them, with the whole human race, but also with all living creatures on earth and all life on the earth. God created this beautiful ecological living system, and God does not want to destroy it. As in the beginning of creation, God wants us to continue to take care of it. The fall in Genesis 3 and God’s solution in 3:15 did not change God’s sociocultural mandate for humanity to take care of God’s whole ecological living system. That is still a part of the whole gospel of the Bible!

Therefore, in the New Testament, the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for the whole creation, and so, as far as human beings are concerned, it is the good news for the whole person: body, mind, and spirit. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not come to this earth to save only humans with disembodied spirits, but the whole person. And that is what is meant by the whole gospel, as Jesus explains in Luke 4:14–21:

On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

This is, indeed, the whole gospel for the whole person for the whole world. The living system of our body, as well as our social and ecological systems, are interrelated and interconnected parts of a larger living system. If one part suffers, the whole system will break down at some point, even if there is a delay for a while.

¹⁰ Gen 9:8–17, emphasis added.

In this context of wholeness, let us consider the biblical concept of *shalom*. In the Old Testament, the concept of *shalom* gives us the best picture of what the whole gospel is all about. In English, when we translate *shalom* merely as *peace*, we do a great injustice to that Hebrew word. Even in the New Testament, Jesus and his disciples understood *peace* with the Hebrew meaning in mind, so that the Greek word *eirēne* (used to translate *shalom* in the Septuagint) was given a new meaning. *Shalom* is very comprehensive, covering the physical, social and spiritual realms. There are multiple meanings of *shalom*: completeness, wholeness, totality, health, integrity, soundness, welfare, security, reconciliation, prosperity, harmony, peace, justice, and salvation.

The name *Yahweh Shalom* appears in Judges 6:22–24 when the Lord reveals himself to Gideon in the form of an angel. The noun *shalom*, as we noted, means “completeness, health, welfare,” which, in essence, signifies being whole, in harmony with God and human beings, and having wholesome relationships. *Shalom* means to be in a state of being at ease—not restless, having peace both inwardly and outwardly, being at rest spiritually, physically, and emotionally. This is the state Jesus was in when he was in the boat asleep in the midst of a storm; the disciples were not in *shalom*, but screaming for help. *Shalom* means wholeness in a life or work. And, as a verb, *shalom* means to be completed or finished, or to make peace.

In the New Testament, we find these same characteristics attributed to the concept of peace. Listed below are several New Testament occurrences of *peace*. We can readily see that the concept is much more comprehensive in scope than we usually imagine it:

In Christ peace has come (Luke 1:79; 2:14)

Christ gave peace (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; John 20:19, 21, 26)

The believer is fitted with the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15)

It is the message of God: the good news or the gospel of peace (Acts 10:36)

It is an instrument of unity (Eph 4:3)

It is the work of the Spirit (Gal 5:22)

We must promote it (Heb 12:14)

We now have peace with God (Rom 5:1–2)

We have the peace of God (John 14:27; Phil 4:4–7)

Taking both the Old and the New Testament understanding of peace into consideration, we may apply it to ourselves as the church in the world. Jeremiah asked the people of God in 29:7 to “Seek the *shalom* of the city . . . and pray for it.” *Shalom* has to be sought and prayed for. This is the same as Jesus saying, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” and this *shalom* is the essence of God’s rule. This is the peace of God that passes all understanding in Philippians 4:4–7. As we as individuals and the church seek *Yahweh Shalom*, he will come to us personally and corporately as “the Lord of peace,” filling us with supernatural strength against every enemy.

This message of *shalom* is central to the “whole counsel of God” which we seek to communicate to the world. To preach this whole counsel, we must first embody that message ourselves so that people not only hear the good news from us, but also see what the good news looks like on earth in a human community. Embodying the message will even protect us in the day of reckoning, as we read in Matthew 25:31–46:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my

Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.”

They also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?”

He will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

How can we miss the clear message of what Jesus had to say in this passage? Just like the Good Samaritan, we have to be alert and vigilant to love and serve our neighbors to show to them what God’s love is all about before we start to share the central core of the gospel of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins and rising again on the third day. If people do not yet know Jesus personally, they will never know how much Jesus loves them and laid down his life for them until they see that love of Jesus in action in our lives and through our living witness.

The whole church

Since our theme is that the whole church must take the whole gospel to the whole world, we now come to look at *the whole church*. The whole church must take the whole gospel anywhere and everywhere, particularly to the unreached peoples of the world. This task demands a global conversation with the persevering saints of the one universal body of Christ in a safe learning environment. Why? So that we can listen to each other patiently and partner with each other as witnesses to those who are still outside the body of Christ. Sometimes we do ministry and missions in different parts of the world like ships passing at night, not knowing what each other is doing.

I am glad that was not the case for Timo and me, with whom I reconnected at the Lausanne conference amid more than 4,000 delegates! Timo Keskitalo was working among immigrants and international students when I was serving the same population in a church in London from 1985 to 1992. He came from Finland and I came from India. We both got to know each other, fellowshiped with each other, and served together among the immigrants. I have always felt that is how the global body of Christ should act. I am glad we were able to reconnect, and, perhaps someday, Timo will visit with me to my hometown Kolkata in India, or here in Boston, and I will be able to provide hospitality to him.

Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.”¹¹ By what? Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “It is appalling that *the most segregated hour* of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.” Yet, we know Jesus said in John 13:34, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” And then Jesus adds in 13:35, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.” Jesus also prayed for the disciples before his death for us in John 17:20–23:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus’ prayer in John 17 was answered in part on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:40–47:

With many other words [Peter] warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Love is the hallmark of Christ’s disciples. Yes, John 13:35 was fulfilled in those verses, “By this shall people know you are my disciples,” and those who were outside the church were attracted to that love in action, not just by all the preaching they heard. That was true communism, in which people willingly shared with others rather than forcefully taking it from others. See again Acts 4:32–35:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

In the first century, some like the proto-Gnostic Cerinthus highly regarded the spiritual/ immaterial aspect of Christianity, but looked down upon the physical and material world, going to the extent of teaching that Christ did not come in the flesh.¹² John took the Greek word *logos* (word) in his gospel and gave it a new meaning. According to the Greek traditional understanding, *logos*, the reason principle, had nothing to do with the material world. They are like oil and water; they do not mix. But John says, “No, no!” In his gospel, 1:1–14, this *logos*, which is from the beginning, is with God and is God. It has now become a human being in the Jesus Christ of history and has lived among us. Now we have a God-Man representing us in heaven. He was resurrected

¹¹ John 13:35.

¹² See Ireneaus, *Against the Heresies*, 1.26.1, trans. Dominic J. Unger (New York: Paulist, 1992), 90; Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 3.27–28, trans. G.A. Williamson, rev. Andrew Louth (New York: Penguin, 1989), 90–91.

from death,¹³ his body was raised and transformed,¹⁴ but he could still eat fish for breakfast,¹⁵ still have the scars of crucifixion,¹⁶ and his tomb is empty because his body was raised.¹⁷ When Jesus taught his disciples to “seek first the kingdom of God,” it was in the context of their worry about meeting physical needs. In the Lord’s Prayer, after Jesus taught us to pray for the kingdom of God and the will of God to be on earth, he dealt with the physical need of our daily bread, with the social need of forgiving others as we need God’s forgiveness, and the spiritual need of deliverance from the evil one. So Jesus did not separate or dichotomize between spiritual, social, and physical needs. And his core value is love, which will keep all three aspects connected in one living system and which will be a signpost for Jesus that participants are his disciples. That is why we love each other.

The global evangelical church in the twenty-first century must not miss this key instrument of love for the evangelization of the whole world. We must love others, respect others, and do good to others who have not yet heard the gospel before we share with them in words the good news of Jesus Christ, so that they too will be followers of Jesus Christ. I also think here Jesus is saying, “Charity begins at home”—to love others first who already belong to the body of Christ, those who are already believers of Jesus Christ, the church local, regional, and universal, those believers who are somewhat different from us linguistically, ethnically, denominationally, and nationally. And loving these wonderful brothers and sisters in Christ is itself a grand witness to the rest of the world who do not yet know about God and Jesus. Consider what is going on in the Middle East right now, then imagine Muslims saying to each other, “You know, those Christians, they love each other more than our Muslim brotherhood does. They are truly following their Master Jesus Christ because he said, “By this love they are being my disciples.” Can you imagine what a testimony to Christ that would be?

Of course, though Jesus’ prayer in John 17 for the disciples begins to be answered among the Jewish believers after the day of Pentecost, as we see in Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35, the early church was not perfect either. We see the lack of love in the hypocrisy and selfishness of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 and in the division between Grecian Jews and Hebraic Jews within the church in Acts 6, but these matters were dealt with immediately. And by Acts 13:1, the church in Antioch begins to have a multiethnic leadership team. God wants the whole church to be bearer of the whole gospel, and especially us Protestants who believe in the priesthood of all believers. How we do that in the world will either invigorate the spread of the gospel among the unbelievers or hinder it. Partnership in mission is the key, where people from all parts of the earth are able to share their unique insights of ministry and people from both the east and the west will listen carefully and patiently.

Brazilian pastor and theologian Valdir Steuernagel, vice president of Christian commitments at World Vision, said, “We need to learn how to serve in a fellowship of rich and poor, Africans and Asians, subsistence farmers and tech professionals.”¹⁸ Steuernagel’s roles expose him to the global church in many countries around the world. He says, “The realities of world missions require partnership—across national boundaries, spanning different cultures, and between rich and poor.”¹⁹ Then the questions arise: “How do we work together in ways that respect our differences yet bring tangible effects? How do we partner so that the rich and powerful do not overwhelm the weak? How do we partner so as to give honor to God through loving “family relations”? These are

13 1 Cor 15:20.

14 Phil 3:21.

15 John 21:13–15.

16 John 20:27.

17 John 20:7.

18 Valdir Steuernagel, “More Partners at the Table,” *Christianity Today* (January 2010), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/globalconversation/january2010/index.html>, accessed January 12, 2012.

19 Ibid.

important questions to ask in these days of global partnership in fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to Steuernagel, partnership is crucial for the church because:

Jesus tells us very clearly that the gospel message is a message of community. Paul says the same in his letters. The gospel is never an individual enterprise. In the same way in which we are called to preach the gospel and serve the poor, we are called to build community. To be a community of the gospel is never an option but always a mandate. Jesus tells us clearly that this is so important, he is praying heartily for it.

Something I have been trying to learn is that God himself is community. It is beautiful, and I am fascinated by it. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are a community, and they model community for us. The prayers of Jesus to his Father are amazing. What the Father tells the Son is deep and loving: “You are my beloved Son.” The way Jesus talks about the Spirit coming is warm and intense: “I’m leaving but the Spirit is coming.” The Trinity is a community that models for us how to get along, how to be interdependent, how to keep our own specificity without the sense of competition.

We are not simply talking about a pragmatic *modus operandi*. We are talking about a deep core of the gospel that we need to obey. And I would say that we evangelicals are not very good at that. We look at it through the lenses of pragmatists. We use the word *cooperation* more than *community* or *family*.²⁰

I find Steuernagel’s words prophetic, and we must give close heed to what he has to say. Just as Jesus said, “that all of them may be one, Father just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe,” that is the picture of community or family Jesus has for us which will attract others to him.

Strategy for evangelizing the whole world

Some of you may have heard about the “three eras of modern mission” within the last two or three centuries. The first era was when western missionaries went to the coastlands of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In the second era, they went to the inlands of these continents, and then the third era began in the 1970s when there was a great concern for reaching the unreached *ethnē* or people groups of the world—and rightly so. I personally knew Ralph Winter of the US Center for World Mission from the early 1990s and am a great fan of his. I believe no one in the present world of missions can downplay his passion for and contributions in highlighting the need to reach un-reached people groups of the world. Perhaps it was Donald McGavran who first introduced the idea of people groups as he referred to *people movements*. Now I feel there is a growing sense among missions strategists and missiologists that a new era is dawning or has already dawned. This is the fourth era of missions—the era of urban missions.

Due to growing urbanization, the migration of people from one place to another for economic and other reasons, and the influence of globalization, people are flocking to the urban centers of the world. Right now, the majority of the people are living in urban contexts, and many of them are living in diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and religiously pluralistic contexts. This will continue to be the trend, not just in cities of the Western world, but also in other non-Western cities for the next few decades. Soon, 70 percent of the world’s people will live in cities. It would seem strategic, therefore, to go where the people are to reach them, since many unreached people groups are already moving to cities. So, if we want to reach the whole world, we have to first reach the cities and the migrant people groups who are moving into our cities. As the Apostle Paul says in Acts:

20 Ibid.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.²¹

God is moving people from one place to another, to the cities of the world, through the process of globalization and migration so that they will seek him and find him. And we, the whole church, from anywhere to everywhere, have a part to play in this grand design of redemption.

Finally, 2,000 years after our Lord's first coming to this earth, Christianity has become a global faith with the whole gospel going from anywhere to everywhere. Wherever the gospel has made a deep impact on the world, the people of these places have become sincere followers of Christ. When they read Matthew 28:19–20 and Acts 1:8, they too are persuaded by the word of God to be witnesses for Christ locally, regionally, and globally. As a result, not only people from Boston, New York, or London are being called to minister to the whole world, but also people from Seoul, Manila, Mumbai, Nairobi, Lagos, São Paulo, and so on. In each of these places, when they read Acts 1:8, they understand very well that they have to be first witnesses in their local places, in their “Jeruselems.” But they also feel called to go to their Judea and Samaria and also to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Today, there are many “Jeruselems” in the world from which the gospel is going forth to the rest of the world. I believe now it is time to connect the “Jeruselems” and their ministry ventures so that the church universal, the body of Christ, may work together and more effectively to fulfill Jesus' prayer in John 17. It is time now to begin a global conversation in a safe learning environment, to listen patiently, and to partner with the saints of the one universal body of Christ as a witness to those who are still outside his body. Is the global church going to rise up and love one another to fulfill Jesus' command? Are we going to partner with one another as one universal body of Christ? Are we going to begin a global conversation to do this so that the rest of the world will understand what God's true love is? May God help us do just that!

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The City Is a Strategic Place for the Church's Global Mission

David Searles

I was being ordained to the gospel ministry in 1994 after becoming the pastor of a small inner-city church in Boston, Massachusetts, the previous year. The preacher for the ordination service was J. Philip Hogan, a former missionary to China and recently retired executive director for the Assemblies of God World Mission Department. At the conclusion of the service, Rev. Hogan worked his way down the line of the recently ordained, greeted me, and said, "I want you to consider becoming a foreign missionary." I replied, "I already am one—in Boston."

The city is a strategic place for the church's global mission to "make disciples of all nations." The separate categories of home missions and foreign missions do not reflect the current reality in the urban setting and in the ministry of the urban church. The rapid pace of urbanization coupled with the immigrant movements of people presents an opportunity for the church to fulfill its calling in the world.

Biblical strategy

The New Testament gives us a picture of early Christianity as primarily an urban movement. Jerusalem is the location of the preaching of the gospel among the religious pilgrims there for the Jewish feast of Pentecost.¹ This Spirit-empowered witness resulted in three thousand converts, and the subsequent persecution scattered these Christians around the Roman Empire. The result was that the message of Jesus the Messiah was carried into the Jewish communities of Greco-Roman cities.² The city provided the place for such a movement to emerge and was part of the strategy of the church's mission in the world.

Paul's apostolic ministry was focused on the cities of the Roman Empire as he made his various missionary journeys. Wayne Meeks in *The First Urban Christians* says that Pauline Christianity was entirely urban and, as a result, provided the fertile soil for its spread throughout Roman world.³ Paul makes the amazing claim in Romans 15:19 that he had preached the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum as he planted churches in various strategic cities in the northeast Mediterranean basin.⁴

The book of Revelation was written to churches located in seven cities in Asia Minor. Richard Bauckham says the Christian world of the book of Revelation is a world of cities.⁵ While the story of creation is located in a garden, the consummation of God's work of new creation is portrayed as a city coming down out of heaven, the New Jerusalem.⁶ The mission and theology of the early church take shape within the urban environment of the first century, which invites us to look at the city as a strategic part of the ongoing mission of the church.

Like first-century Roman cities, which offered tremendous mobility to the people,⁷ the twenty-first century city has become the location of great immigrant movements of people. The Salvadoran consulate in Boston has recently moved into the building next door to Central Assembly of God Church in East Boston. It is a symbol of the relationship that exists between this neighborhood,

1 Acts 2.

2 Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 10.

3 Ibid., 8.

4 Ibid., 10.

5 Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 126.

6 Rev 21.

7 Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 17–22.

other Salvadoran people in the region, and the nation of El Salvador. Almost 6,000 Salvadoran immigrants live in East Boston.⁸

Practical reality

The immigrant movements in cities are complex, diverse, and subject to change. One member of the Central Assembly of God Church who lives in East Boston is a Kenyan man who owns farmland in Kenya on which he grows tea that he sells to the Lipton Tea Company. He traveled back to Kenya this past summer, and church in East Boston sent a donation for the Kenyan church, which is in the middle of a building project. The church in turn sent us a letter and pictures to thank us for the offering. These global business and church relationships have emerged as a result of our presence in the city. Recognizing the developing immigrant realities of the city is important for our understanding of the church's global mission and our participation in that mission.

The urban church is necessary for global mission

While the city is a strategic element in the church's global mission, the church located in the city is the instrument through which God carries out that mission. The urban place is prominent in the self-identity of the church in the New Testament. Paul writes, "To the church of God in Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2), which gives a specific city as the spatial identity of the church. Lesslie Newbigin, missionary theologian, comments, "In the New Testament, the Church is always and only designated by reference to two realities; one, God, God in Christ; and the other, the place where the Church is."⁹ An appropriate identity for Central Assembly of God Church is its location in Boston.

The Gospel of John contends that "the Word was God . . . the Word became flesh and blood and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). It is the incarnation that shapes our understanding of the person of Jesus Christ and must also shape how we do urban ministry. "Those not originally from the city who choose to live among the people of the city—usually among the economically poor—often use the idea of incarnation."¹⁰ The concept of incarnation informs Christian ministry and the church in an urban setting like Boston about the importance of dwelling in the city.

Vital to the church's global mission is the presence of the church in the city. Some may try to water down the ideal, claiming that they can physically relocate outside the city but still maintain a heart for the city. In doing so, we may be practicing a kind of dualism which tries to spiritualize our relationship to the urban neighborhood. John Perkins challenges this practice with his holistic view of Christ's incarnation: "But I'm glad that Jesus didn't just relocate his heart. We are all grateful that he came to earth in the flesh."¹¹

When my wife, Barbara, and I began to discuss a calling to ministry in the city of Boston, people suggested to us that we could live in a suburban community and commute in to the city. Their stated concern was for our safety and also for the implications of raising a family in the city. While we appreciated their concern for us, we also responded to them with an explanation of the incarnation of Christ. Jesus could have commuted from heaven, but it was a necessary part of God's work of redemption for "Jesus to move into the neighborhood."¹² It is equally necessary for God's people to live in the city to be Christ's body in the city and the world. While the church must identify with the neighborhood where it is located, it must also understand its interconnected and holistic relationship with the city, region, and world.

8 Boston Redevelopment Authority Publication 610-1, *Imagine All the People* (Boston: City of Boston, 2009), 12.

9 Lesslie Newbigin, "On Being the Church for the World," *Lesslie Newbigin/Missionary Theologian: A Reader*, compiled by Paul Weston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 132.

10 Jude Tiersma, "What does it mean to be incarnational when we are not the Messiah?" *God So Loves the City*, ed. Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 9.

11 Ibid.

12 John 1:14, *The Message*.

While Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, “To the church of God in Corinth,” he continues with, “to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours” (1 Cor 1:2). Paul writes to a particular church in a particular city, and, at the same time, he writes with a sense that they are connected to the global church. Paul displays an intuitive awareness of the church in Corinth’s living system.

Understanding the city’s living system

Doug Hall has defined a living system as “an orderly, highly complex, and highly interrelated arrangement of living components that work together to accomplish a high level goal when in proper relationship to each other.”¹³ My body is a living system. The body of Christ in a city is a living system. A city is a living system.

Our tendency is to view the world in fragmented, isolated pieces of reality rather than as the interactive, holistic creation God designed. This affects the way that we look at cities in all their complexity, along with the relationship to the surrounding region and the world. Hall challenges this fragmented view of the city when he examines common mental models of space:

When I talk about *space*, I mean the area that contains everything in the universe and extends in all directions. In our Western culture, we tend to break all of creation, seen and unseen, into fragmented, distinct (in the sense of unconnected and discrete), and definable entities, and we try to do ministry separately in each area. We assume each distinct cultural and geographical “turf” is very separate from every other. We may think of our neighborhood as very discrete place, our church as very distinct from other churches, and persons within the church as having definable roles. We think that ministry is done by individuals in separate particular spaces that are not connected to what is done in other places. We don’t really see how our church or its ministry is directly affected by the broader world.¹⁴

The church must dwell in and identify with a particular place, but must do that with a holistic view that also sees the connection and interaction with the city, region, and world.

The natural world offers us some models of space that can help us to better understand the relationship between the neighborhood, city, and the larger living system. Hall gives this example of the relationship of an individual tree to the larger forest:

In a living system, every tree is a part of a forest, which is part of a broader ecosystem that makes individual life possible. When my activities are done appropriately in a small place that is in tune with how broad social dynamics work, those dynamics will take what is done and spread it through the entire system, because everything is interrelated in space. We cannot change something in one place without dealing with its total context, which created what it is.¹⁵

Like the tree in its relationship with the forest, an individual congregation cannot be isolated from the larger body of Christ or from its environment. An individual neighborhood cannot be isolated from the rest of the city. A city cannot be isolated from a country or even the rest of the world. Health and vitality of a local place are related to the health and vitality of the whole.

As we become aware of this interconnectedness, we can begin to learn and work within the larger system. Hall recognizes that the city can reach the world in the pattern of Acts 1:8. This would not happen because of some plan to do it, but because the city is interconnected with the world.¹⁶ Our small urban church in East Boston has parishioners located in nine different local

13 Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, and Steve Daman, *The Cat and the Toaster* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), xxiv.

14 Ibid., 296.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

communities with people from twenty-three different countries. While we have an identity as a church in Boston, we must also pay attention to the regional and global relationships that we have and discover a way to do Christian mission in harmony with that reality.

In the New Testament, the city was a significant part of the way the church's mission was accomplished. Doug Hall suggests that the Apostle Paul saw the city as an organism with a living system designed by God, which would spontaneously export Christianity to the region around the city.¹⁷ In Central Assembly of God Church, we are in relationship with people from countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Europe.¹⁸ These relational networks extending to those places through friendship and family are potential avenues for Christian mission from East Boston to the world.

One member of Central Assembly of God Church is a pastor from Angola. This past summer, some Angolan pastors came to visit him in Boston. We met together, and I discovered that they are now in ministry in Europe among the African diaspora community there. Recently, they have invited me to go to France and Belgium to teach other ministers and to preach in the church. Here is an example of these natural connections between Boston, Angola, France, and Belgium. This is an outgrowth of the city's living system and holds great possibilities for the church's global mission.

Potential for counterproductivity

It is possible for a church or organization, though motivated by love, to act in a counterproductive way as it engages its global reality. My daughter, who is a freshman at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts, recently heard a chapel speaker talk about the benevolent work of Thom's Shoes. This shoe company has promoted to its customers a program in which they will donate a pair of shoes to a person in Africa for each pair of Thom's Shoes sold.

The effort was thought to be successful in that many African people have received shoes, but the unintended consequence is that many African shoemakers have been put out of business. The local Africans are not buying shoes, since they now have free ones. We must be aware of the potential for counterproductivity in our thinking about the church's global mission.

We have three immigrant pastors from Liberia, Angola, and Uganda who now attend Central Assembly of God Church. They all are recognized as leaders by the church in their countries, but they have not all had the opportunity to receive formal biblical and theological education. Recently, we have all met to discuss this need and the beginning of a class for these pastors to provide training in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics in an interactive class environment. With the potential of counterproductivity in mind, our concern was to develop an educational setting in conjunction with these African pastors rather than simply to offer a class for them. This class began in November 2011. We are open to pastors and Christian workers from other churches participating in this biblical and theological educational opportunity, which is affordable and accessible.

Doing global mission in harmony with the city's living system

Given the possibility of unintended, counterproductive, long-term results, we ought to engage in Christian mission with humility and openness to learning. Learning about the city's living system that then leads us to action must take place from within the system. We cannot impose a "vision" on a living system from outside without negatively affecting the system.

A young missionary came to Boston to plant a church using a ministry model that focused on outreach to children by doing action-packed events in local parks, gathering a crowd, and

¹⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁸ The people are from Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Liberia, Angola, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Brazil, Philippines, Japan, South Korea, Haiti, St. Kitts, Nevus, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, and Argentina.

then preaching to the people. Initially, the ministry attracted crowds of children to the events, but it was not as successful in bringing those children into the church. The financial supporters were looking for quick numerical results, which brought added pressure to the ministry. The stress became overwhelming, the young minister fell into sin, and the ministry was dissolved. The missionary came with a “vision” that he imposed on the system, and the long-term result was counterproductive.

Team learning is a model that provides support and dynamic interaction for the ongoing learning process. A small group or leadership team in a church may meet together regularly to learn about the city using all the available resources. It is important for the group to learn to function as a learning team.¹⁹ The team’s learning should emerge out of their experience of dwelling in the city, which provides the foundation for understanding the living system. The social sciences, published studies, and government information can contribute to our knowledge. Relationships and conversations with a wide variety of people in the city give opportunity for deepening and broadening the learning. This calls us to a lifelong commitment to our education about the city. The work of learning prepares us to participate in the church’s global mission in harmony with the city’s living system.

A danger in our efforts to learn about the city is our inclination to see things in a separate and fragmented way. We must find a way to see the city in all its complexity, but to keep in mind the whole picture. “Our conscious minds are capable of processing seven variables at a time.”²⁰ This limitation in seeing and understanding the complexity of a city leads us to reduce the whole to a smaller, more manageable part and then begin to operate out of that narrow perception. When approaching the task of the church’s global mission, we might hear people make recommendations like, “All you need to do is _____.” Fill in the blank with any number of options, such as have more prayer, raise more missionary giving, recruit more missionaries, or a number of other possibilities. The result is still the reduction of the complexity of the task to simplistic categories. As a result, we miss seeing the whole picture.

Another challenge in our learning is our mental models about the city and the task of the church’s global mission. Mental models are “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.”²¹ Our mental models are often subconscious, but shape how we see the world around us. Much like the lenses in a pair of glasses, a mental model allows us to see the world, but is not part of our conscious awareness as we see the scene before us. Sometimes our mental models are faulty and do not give us a true picture of what is there.

Only as we see reality through other lenses can we realize that our mental models of the city are not clearly in focus with the truth. Some years ago, I held a mental model of the church’s global mission that focused primarily on giving money to a centralized missions department to send missionaries overseas. The Assemblies of God national office published the missionary giving of each district in the United States, and the Spanish districts were among the bottom in financial giving. My mental model of missions led me to think that these Spanish churches were not doing much for the church’s global mission. One day, I had lunch with David Martinez, pastor of Tabernáculo Evangélico Asambleas de Dios in Revere, Massachusetts, and heard that this church had planted twenty-five churches in Central America. My previous mental model was not accurate at all. This immigrant, Spanish-speaking church was functioning within the living system of the Boston area and was actually doing missions in a dynamic way that I had been unable to see.

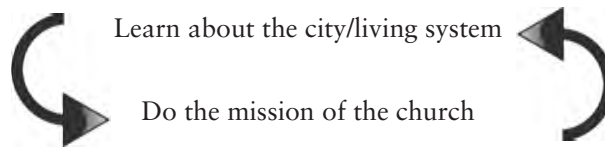
A posture of learning becomes the context for our doing the mission of the church. We need to learn about the city’s living system and how we can function in harmony with that system. We need

19 Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 9–11.

20 Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 147.

21 Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 89.

to see our faulty mental models of viewing the city and the church's mission. This process becomes a kind of learning-doing-learning method of involvement.



Learning prepares us to do the mission, which is then followed by continued learning and evaluation, which further guides our doing.

One issue that we will contend with is our willingness to be patient through this process. Our American tendency is “hurry up and do something.” The time and energy given to learning and evaluation may seem to some like a waste of time in comparison to the real task of doing the mission of the church. Yet the responsibility of understanding a city's living system and then acting in harmony with that system is a complex one that requires our diligent and faithful work. In our hurry to do something, we may initially produce what seem to be positive results that are in fact counterproductive over time.

We must be concerned with “the fruit that lasts” in order to do the church's global mission in harmony with the city's living system. Jesus says to his disciples, “I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last (John 15:16).” Short-term results can fool us because they may initially appear to be successful, but over time are counterproductive. There is great pressure in churches and missions organizations for quick success. Our concern for “the fruit that lasts” will challenge us to continue to evaluate and learn and be willing to make corrections in the way we do mission.

To do global mission in concert with the city's living system calls us to follow the Christian way of repentance. In response to the message of the kingdom, Jesus called people to repent (Matt 4:17), which means to change direction.²² Repentance is a way of life of continuing to turn toward the kingdom. Not only individuals, but also organizations concerned with the church's global mission must be open to repent and change direction. We may learn that we have been operating with a faulty mental model. This awareness calls for repentance and adopting a more redemptive model of ministry. This will prepare us for church and ministry transformation.

We must learn how the city relates with the rest of the world. This learning calls us to build humble relationships with the immigrant community in the city, including the immigrant church. Our concern is to see how the city is already connected to the nations of the world and what is already happening as a result of these global connections. In these existing relationships and connections, the church in the city may learn how to participate in the city's living system to do the global mission of the church.

Prayer is critical to the participation of the urban church in global mission. We must pray the prayer of the blind beggar along the road. When Jesus came near, he cried out, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” When Jesus asked him what he wanted, the blind man responded, “I want to see” (Luke 18:35–42). In our efforts to understand the city's living system, we are blind. We have faulty mental models. May Jesus heal our blindness.

Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We are a people dependent on Jesus to understand a city's living system and to participate in the church's global mission in a fruitful way.

22 N. T. Wright, *Matthew For Everyone*, vol. 1. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 30.

God chooses weak things and uses them to do his work in the world.²³ Having been given sight, we pray that God's Spirit would give us power to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

The city is a strategic place for the church's global mission, and the urban church is uniquely positioned to participate in that mission. This kind of ministry calls for humble learners who are committed to live and work in the midst of the city and its complexity. The missionary challenge that J. Philip Hogan presented to me at my ordination service is being answered, but in different and surprising ways. Urban ministry practitioners and urban churches are doing global mission through the city's living system if we only have eyes to see.

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²³ 1 Cor 1:27.



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Toward a Living System Theology for Discipleship and Leadership Development in the Complex Urban Context¹

Richard Schneberger

The Story: Jeremy

OKLAHOMA CITY—Police said a man who was shot and killed in the parking lot of an Oklahoma City apartment complex was working as a pizza delivery driver.

Investigators said Jeremy Moore was killed at the Lantanna Apartments in the 7400 block of Northwest 10th Street. Neighbors called officers after hearing gunshots at about 7 p.m. A Papa John's Pizza delivery vehicle was found just about 100 yards from Moore's body.

Police said someone made a fake call to have a pizza delivered and then killed Moore after he arrived. They said the motive appeared to be robbery and won't say how much money Moore had with him. A Papa John's employee told KOCO that workers aren't allowed to carry more than \$20.

Moore was the father of a newborn baby girl. A longtime friend said Moore was working part-time at Papa John's to try to make extra money to buy a house and to raise his baby. "Jeremy was a saint," said Rev. Lance Schmitz, of the Oklahoma City First Church of the Nazarene. "He's just always been a person that loved people, wanted to take care of people and cared about people and the environment."²

On Friday, November 7, 2008, my good friend Jeremy Dwayne Moore was gunned down by a group of teenagers. The irrationality and incomprehensibility of evil was never more evident to me than on that day. Jeremy and I had roomed together in college and recently reconnected when I moved back into the area as pastor of the church three blocks from the site of his murder. He worked for a printing company in Oklahoma City and began delivering pizzas as a second job to help support his growing family. Jeremy was the proud father of a new baby girl named Lillie. She was born a little over a week before his death. He just happened to be the one to take that delivery call, the one to drive into that dark maze of mostly abandoned apartments, the one to get out of his car searching for the right address, the one to be met by a group of young men looking for some "street cred," the one to be shot and left to bleed out on the cold, hard pavement.

It took the police a few weeks to finish their investigation, but eventually four young African American men were picked up in connection with Jeremy's murder. An eighteen-year-old named Zonta West was the alleged shooter, but three others were involved in the planning and execution. This difficult situation became even more complicated when we found out that a couple of the young men had some connection with our ministry. The eldest conspirator, Larry Stelly, who was twenty years old at the time of Jeremy's murder, was accused of providing these other young men with the murder weapon. Larry had been involved in the youth group several years earlier when I was the youth pastor. And a few of his family members still have connections with our church.

In the midst of this tragedy, I was caught in the confusing and difficult situation of ministering to both the victim's and perpetrator's families. Wounded, broken, and feeling

1 This is a précis of a project paper presented to the faculty of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Center for Urban Ministry Education.

2 News report from KOCO News Channel 5.

completely inadequate, it was this event that brought me to the end of myself. It was evident that pastoring in this context was more complex than my current models of ministry were capable of comprehending. This began my search for better mental models to faithfully engage in kingdom mission for our community. The journey brought me to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Center for Urban Ministry Education, where I have begun the process of developing a living system theology.³

Reading the context: our battle

Robert C. Linthicum, in his seminal work *City of God / City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*, states that "The basic premise of this urban biblical theology is that the city is a primary battle ground between God and Satan, between the Lord of Light and the Prince of Darkness."⁴ This underlying theological reality was never more apparent to me than in the wake of Jeremy's murder. Though I had long understood this biblical concept intellectually, in the midst of this event, it became a tangible reality. I came to the understanding that we were on the front lines of an ongoing spiritual battle. We are engaged in a battle for lives and for the soul of our city.

Linthicum proclaims, "I believe that what the biblical writers are telling us in terms of the church, a city, and a nation is that everything has a spiritual dimension. . . . That system is infused with a spiritual essence; it has unimagined and unexplored inner depths that are its 'soul.'"⁵ In other words, there is a living, highly complex, interrelated dimension to every human community. In fact, all of God's creation is part of a living system. Reflecting on the spiritual essence of the city enables us to engage those living dimensions that we do not typically think about.

Dissection and death

Often, our attempts at community assessment are built around faulty mental models that may look at one particular aspect of the community, but fail to take into consideration the relational dynamics of a living system. Economists will explore the strength of the local financial systems, social workers may engage in a needs analysis of a particular neighborhood, law enforcement agencies will track crime rates, and educational institutions will document scholastic success or failure. One can find all kinds of demographic and statistical data on any given community. And yet, this information does not tell us much about how the living system actually works.

Churches and ministry leaders, for their part, often use business models to exegete their surrounding community.⁶ It seems that we have turned to every other practical discipline as primary influences in crafting ministry for our communities while theology and biblical studies have been minimized in the daily life of Christian organizations. This reflects a linear hermeneutic,⁷ which shapes much current reading of Scripture. This implicit dualism is consistent with the ancient Greek distinction between the *kosmos aesthetos* (world of sense perception) and the *kosmos noetos* (world of the mind or ideals), similar to what Kant later calls *noumena* and *phenomena*, in all linear language. This dualistic cast of the mind rips apart naturally integrated aspects of life and has led to persistent heresies that continue to plague the Christian church.

3 The methodology I have used to engage this subject was developed by Charles Van Engen and is fully articulated in *God So Loves the City: Seeking a Theology for Urban Mission*, ed. Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009). A detailed explanation can specifically found in chapter 11, "Constructing a theology of mission for the city." This missiological methodology for engaging in theological reflection is in full harmony with living system thinking.

4 Robert Linthicum, *City of God / City of Satan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 138.

5 Ibid., 75.

6 The SWOT analysis was popular in our area at one time. A group of leaders reflect together on what they perceive as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in their current context. This may be a nice leadership exercise, but it does not align with living system theology.

7 "Linear hermeneutics" is a phrase used by Joel Green in his essay "Scripture and Theology: Failed Experiments, Fresh Perspectives" (*Interpretation* 56 [2002], 5–20) essentially to refer to the interpretive tradition of J. P. Gabler and the more recent manifestation of this movement as articulated through the work of Krister Stendahl. I believe that there is a significant correlation to what Senge refers to as "linear thinking" or "linear language."

Detail versus dynamic complexity

These interpretation methods mirror a modern, sterile, scientific mindset that seeks to dissect and categorize in order to control. This way of thinking is similar to traditional systematic theology, which is based on detail complexity. Systematic theologians have been able to construct clear systems on paper that have definite boundaries and are relatively easy to understand. This rational system is what Paul Hiebert called a “bounded set.” These articulations do contain some elements of reality, but they fail to adequately reveal the dynamic complexity of a living system, which is illustrated in what Hiebert called a “centered set.”⁸

If we utilize faulty mental models, we are ultimately left with a cold, dead, dissected cadaver. Little genuine understanding is developed as to how the living system actually works. To use Douglas Hall’s metaphor, we are treating a cat, a created, highly complex, and thoroughly interrelated living system, like a toaster, a relatively simple piece of human technology primarily used for its functionality.⁹

We need authentic repentance. We need *metanoia*—A change of mind or mind-shift, as Peter Senge has described it. Living system theology seeks to offer us new mental models that enable us to engage the dynamic complexity of our context with more of a centered set image of reality.

Tripartite nature of living system theology

Living system theology integrates the *spiritual, physical, and social* contexts, or what Eldin Villafañe has called a theology of place (*physical*), prayer (*spiritual*), and peace/shalom (*social*).¹⁰ Systemic theology works with the dynamic complexity of the living God who creates living systems. Christian theology is most adequate when understood within this organic system.

One would think that systemic thinking should be second nature for orthodox, evangelical Christians. We certainly find these complex interrelations within a Trinitarian theological language. As our creedal confession proclaims, Jesus Christ is of the same being as the Father (Greek *homo-ousion to Patri*). The Father, Son, and Spirit are all *homo-ousion*, of the same being. The mystery of our confession points to the reality that we cannot know the Father, Son, or Spirit independent of their onto-relations¹¹ with each other. “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NIV). Our theological language should reflect this dynamic, relational encounter with the living God rather than the sterilized language of a dead, rational philosophy.

Leadership development

One of the things that deeply disturbed me about the events surrounding Jeremy’s murder was that we had had significant interactions with at least one of the young men involved. Our faith community had the opportunity to influence him during some of the key moments in his early development. These other young men had been at least exposed to our educational system, and likely had contact with several other community organizations. What went wrong? How did we fail so miserably in their personal, moral, social, and spiritual development that they would seek acceptance and value in a culture of violence? Our educational process must have been deeply flawed or severely inadequate for something like this to occur. Our systems were broken.

Education, discipleship, and leadership development are all interrelated concepts. Etymologically, the word “education” is derived from the Latin *ēdūcō* (I educate, I train) which is related to the homonym *ēdūcō* (I lead forth, I take out; I raise up, I erect) from *ē-* (“from, out

8 Hiebert develops the concepts of “bounded,” “fuzzy,” “centered,” and “fuzzy-relational” sets in his *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). See also his discussion on category formation in *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 33–37.

9 Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, and Steve Daman, *The Cat and the Toaster* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 53–54.

10 Eldin Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2–3.

11 “Onto-relations” is a term that I learned by reading T. F. Torrance, coming from “ontological relations” and meaning relations that are inherent to being. See Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (New York: T&T Clark, 1996).

of”) and *dūcō* (I lead, I conduct).¹² In a sense, it means to “draw out” one’s God-given potential. Discipleship, then, describes the way that people are developed as followers of Christ, which we believe is the highest good one might achieve or to which one might aspire. This includes the ways in which we develop and educate leaders for service and ministry. For the sake of this article, these three words will be used nearly interchangeably to describe the process of Christian formation. This is the process of drawing out God-given potential in others so that one might move toward one’s teleological end in Christ by learning how to follow Jesus in our current context while also leading others to the Way.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer powerfully reminds us in his moving work *The Cost of Discipleship*, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”¹³ We need to rediscover the all-consuming call of Christ. This is a call to learn not a system of belief, but a new way of life. “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me’” (John 14:6 NIV). Early followers of Christ were referred to as those who belonged to the Way.¹⁴ And as Karl Barth once said, “Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is Himself the way.”¹⁵

Leadership development within the complex living system in an urban context has too often been addressed through a formalized programmatic approach. This method is not highly effective for the formation of diverse urban leaders. It is predicated on a bounded set, a linear theological foundation, that developed out of rational, enlightenment thinking following the industrial revolution. Our current discipleship methods tend to teach people sanitized systems of belief rather than a new way of life that is relationally engaged with the Triune God. We are in search of better mental models that more adequately relate to the realities of living system ministry. The intention of this short article is to articulate a living system theology of organic leadership development for the complex urban context.

Challenges

One of the things that has drawn me personally to love and appreciate ministry in the current urban context is the great diversity of people and cultures. “Sociologists predict that by the year 2050, the majority of United States residents will be people of color.”¹⁶ God is doing something in this generation. The world is being shaken up. As Ray Bakke has described, one no longer has to travel great distances to engage in the Great Commission; the nations are coming into our neighborhoods.¹⁷ This offers the powerful potential for prophetic glimpses of the eschatological kingdom within multicultural worshipping communities. However, the very thing that can be so exciting and stimulating also poses some of the most significant challenges to discipleship in the city.

Despite the existence of diversity, there is still a great deal of segregation, especially within the Christian community:

The unfortunate reality is that over 90% of churches in the United States are racially segregated and in general, there is little interaction between churches of different ethnic background. From the perspective of minority and immigrant churches, the explanation of this reality is deeply rooted in the history of racism in the U.S., as well as in the desire of immigrants regarding cultural preservation in a new land. The separation of the “white” church is historically rooted in a sense of superiority.¹⁸

12 “Education,” Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education>, accessed January 15, 2012.

13 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 89.

14 Cf. Acts 9:2.

15 “Karl Barth,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Barth, accessed January 20, 2012.

16 Bianca Duemling, “The Diverse Leadership Project: Context & Overview,” *Emmanuel Research Review* 69 (August 2011), <http://egc.org/err69>.

17 Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987).

18 Cf. Duemling, “The Diverse Leadership Project.” Another great resource on segregation in the church is Michael

Communication, customs, and unspoken expectations are some of the issues one must face in cross-cultural and multicultural ministry contexts. Racism remains a reality as well and is part the systems of oppression that disempower and marginalize potential leaders.

Where do we begin with the challenges of segregation and racism? Hall reminds us that we enter through poverty. As in dealing with any human sin, humility and repentance begin the process of redemption. This is what minister Mark Gornik discovered in his experience moving to the Sandtown neighborhood of Baltimore. He writes, “If we really grasped our faith, we had no choice but to repent . . . we believed that we had to deal with the unresolved habits and costs of America’s original sin, racism, and to wake up to the tragedy present in our own city.”¹⁹ For the redemptive process of reconciliation to begin, we must enter through repentance. Only in recognizing our own poverty and weakness can we ever hope to truly develop diverse urban leaders.

Voluntary spiritual poverty is where we begin; however, genuine urban poverty is also a key challenge to discipleship in the urban context. Poverty in this sense is another form of oppression. It is not solely about a lack of resources, but should instead be understood as a relational concept. As Jayakumar Christian writes, “Poverty means persons become nonpersons.”²⁰ It is the process of depersonalization, which robs people of their God-given identity and value. In a similar vein, Thiessen writes, “Poverty is to have no reflective skills.”²¹ Poverty has less to do with a lack of resources as it has to do with a lack of value, significance, hope, and future. Discipleship involves restoring a sense of significance.

In a wonderful interview, the late John Stott offered a key insight into the mission of the church in a secular city: “I believe that these so-called secular people are engaged in a quest for at least three things. The first is transcendence. . . . The second thing is significance. . . . And thirdly is their quest for community. . . . These things about our humanity are on our side in our evangelism, because people are looking for the very things we have to offer them.”²² Transcendence (*spiritual/prayer*), significance (*physical/place*), and community (*social/peace*)—we have the three things that every human being desires. There is more potential today than at any other time in history to make disciples of all nations. However, we need better models of multicultural ministry and leadership development to be effective in our current context. It is important that we turn to Scripture as we search for a way forward.

Rereading the Scriptures

What does the Bible have to say to us about discipleship? There is no way that we can do an in-depth study of all the leaders throughout Scripture in this paper, but we will explore some key characters to glean some general themes on biblical leadership development. Using broad brushstrokes, we will reread the text with this theme and our context in mind.

The next generation

Joshua was certainly one of the great leaders of God’s people. He was listed among the leaders of Israel. He must have been highly respected among the people to be chosen as one of the twelve sent to explore the land of Canaan. We all remember Joshua and Caleb’s response of faith in light of the people’s fear. After Moses’ death, it is Joshua who led the people through the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. The walls of Jericho fell as they marched in obedience to the Lord’s command. And, of course, we all remember the climax of his call to worship the one true God:

O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

19 Mark Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 170.

20 Charles Van Engen et al., *God So Loves the City* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1994), 203.

21 Ibid., 92.

22 “Interview with John Stott,” *New Frontiers*, http://www.newfrontierstogether.org/Groups/101475/Newfrontiers/Magazine/Previous_Issues/Vol_3_02_Jan/Interview_With_John_Scott.aspx, accessed January 16, 2012.

“Choose this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15 NIV). We embroider these words on pillows and keep them on plaques in our homes as a reminder of unwavering fidelity to the Lord God.

And yet, one must ask, what happened to cause the subsequent generation to fall away from faithful relationship with YHWH? How did the next generation lose their way so quickly?

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up *who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel*. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. (Judg 2:10–11 NIV, italics added)

“The first generation (2:6–9) was that of Joshua and his contemporaries. It is referred to in order to provide a contrast with what was to follow. It is marked by two things which belong together: its people served the Lord, and they took possession of the land he had given them.”²³ Joshua’s generation was faithful. The fact that Joshua was buried in the Promised Land sums up a long life of faithful obedience to the Lord. “That was contrast with the second generation (2:10–18). It ‘did not know the Lord or the work which he had done for Israel.’ Consequently, in the words which will become all too familiar, ‘the people did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.’”²⁴

How is it that an entire generation grew up after Joshua who did not know the Lord or the story of his salvation? Who is responsible for their failure?

We may ask, how could a generation which had simply not been there at the time of the exodus be blamed for being born too late? The answer is that Scripture sees the experience of redemption as being infinitely renewable. As children ask parents and parents teach children, as those “who have not known it . . . hear and learn,” the liberating truth of the exodus-gospel can repeatedly become a reality. There is no excuse for the “second generation” of Judges 2.²⁵

There is a sense of shared responsibility in this context. Bobby Bose brought to my attention the way that this passage parallels second- and third-generation dynamics within immigrant communities in the United States. The first generation works so hard to possess the land, while the second generation is busy enjoying the fruit and assimilating to the dominate culture. By the third generation, language and cultural identity is almost completely lost. As Trent Butler observes,

Joshua’s generation, as long as it lasted, could bear eyewitness to God’s great acts. But the generation with the revered servant of the Lord leading them died out. For Judges the importance lies in the situation v 10 describes. The previous generation was inevitably replaced by a new generation, an ignorant generation. They did “not know” Israel’s God or the ‘actions’ that God had done for Israel. In one generation true religion, the religion of Joshua 24, vanished from the promised land. . . . A generation that does not teach its children, as Josh 4:6, 21 advised, would lose its children to false religion.²⁶

Dennis Olson points out that “This text raises the urgent question of how faith is or is not passed from one generation to the next. The text reminds us that the heritage of faith is not something automatically inherited by passive osmosis from one generation to the next. A faithful generation can have unfaithful children.”²⁷ There needs to be an intentional process of teaching and training of the next generation.

23 Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 28.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 29.

26 Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary: Judges* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 42.

27 Dennis T. Olson, “The Book of Judges” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 753.

Failure to educate the next generation is an ongoing theme throughout the Hebrew text. Idolatry, judgment, and destruction are the sad results of this great sin of omission. It seems that Eli was so busy being the “pastor” that he failed to disciple his own family. “Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord ” (1 Sam 2:12). “Eli spoke to his sons but took no direct action. Perhaps he no longer had any control over them because he was so old. However, the text seems to imply that this was just another example of Eli’s well meaning but rather ineffective character.”²⁸ Though Eli was developing the young Samuel, he failed to lead his own family. God seems to take that matter quite seriously. The Lord reveals his intentions to Samuel in a vision:

At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, “The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.” (1 Sam 3:12–14)

Then we get to King Solomon’s children who rip the fragile nation apart. And within a few generations, matters had completely fallen apart. “In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him” (1 Kgs 16:29–30). Ahab became the epitome of ungodly leadership. “You have observed the statutes of Omri and all the practices of Ahab’s house; you have followed their traditions. Therefore I will give you over to ruin and your people to derision; you will bear the scorn of the nations” (Micah 6:16). It is evident that a significant key in the unfaithfulness and ultimate exile of God’s people begins with their neglect to disciple their own children. They failed to raise up the next generation of godly leaders and, as a result, they shared in God’s judgment.

Intergenerational education

Educating our children is one of the primary emphases of one of the most seminal passages in the Old Testament—the *shema*.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up (Deut 6:4–7).

“*These words* (i.e., the book of Deuteronomy) are to be known by every adult member of the community; they are to be taught diligently to their children (vv 6–9). Nothing is more important to the future of God’s people than the communication of *these words*.”²⁹ Nothing is more important than developing and discipling the next generation.

Interestingly, Jesus puts children at the center of what it means to fully participate in the kingdom of God. As Stanley Hauerwas so aptly states,

Jesus called to himself a child—the essence of one who is powerless, dependent, needy, little, and poor. He placed the child “in the midst of them,” as a concrete, visible sacrament of how the Kingdom looks. Jesus’ act with the child is interesting. In many of our modern, sophisticated congregations, children are often viewed as distractions. We tolerate children only to the extent they promise to become “adults” like us. Adult members sometimes complain they cannot pay attention to the sermon, they cannot listen to the beautiful music, when fidgety children are beside them in the pews. “Send

28 Mary J. Evans, *The Message of Samuel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 35–36.

29 Duane L. Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 142.

them away,” many adults say. Create “Children’s Church” so these distracting children can be removed in order that we adults can pay attention.

Interestingly, Jesus put a child in the centre of his disciples, “in the midst of them,” in order to help them pay attention. The child, in Jesus’ mind, was not an annoying distraction. The child was a last-ditch effort by God to help the disciples pay attention to the odd nature of God’s kingdom. Few acts of Jesus are more radical, countercultural, than his blessing of children.³⁰

When we segregate children for the sake of order and control, we have misunderstood the organic nature of the body of Christ. If they are kept on the margins and not fully integrated in the life of the faith community, then we run the risk of an entire generation growing up not knowing the Lord or participating in God’s salvation narrative. I am not implying that all age-specific programming is wrong, but often the motivation is to occupy or entertain children rather than to genuinely disciple them. We need to equip families with the ability to train and educate their children as followers of Christ. Children may not contribute to the institutional success of the church by giving or serving, but they are our most valuable resource and should be restored to a central place in the community of faith.

Separation versus incarnation

In the New Testament, the Pharisees provide us with another negative example of leadership development. Jesus is incarnationally teaching his disciples a new way of life, while the Pharisees have in significant ways segregated themselves from the “commoners” and, in so doing, have separated themselves from God in a very real sense. They have acquired status and societal influence in their sacred roles, but instead of teaching people how to relationally engage with the living God, they have set up systems of belief that enable them to maintain institutional power. Their focus on teaching and maintaining human traditions reflects a static, systematic, bounded-set mental model. The desire is control, and the end result is an anthropocentric religion. In other words, they are practicing and teaching one of the subtlest forms of idolatry.

Unfortunately, this form of idolatry can be found in various manifestations of religious life throughout history, even in the early church. It is reflected in one of Paul’s messages to the Corinthian church: “My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ’” (1 Cor 1:11–12). Personality cults still thrive in the church today, but they only serve to distract and divide us.

The Pharisees certainly had schools and were one of the primary groups involved in education at the time of Jesus. They would have undoubtedly understood themselves to be involved in leadership development. However, their methods were a significant contrast to the discipleship style of Jesus. Their very name implies that they are “set apart.”³¹ For the Pharisees, to be “holy” meant to be segregated from that which is “polluted.” Their vision was one of a purified people completely separated from anything sinful.

With Jesus, we find a method that is fully incarnational. It is the presence of a holy God infused into the heart of the living system that purifies, heals, and makes whole. “The incarnation as a reality, symbol or principle should inform the mission and task of theological education and, thus, the relationship that theological education has with the church, the academy, and the society.”³² Jesus’ method is not to pull bright students out of their context and place them in an institutional environment, yet this is what we do in our current context to train and prepare leaders for ministry. We insert them into our educational institutions, like putting a cog in the machine, and we expect

30 Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 96.

31 The root of the Hebrew word *Pharisee* comes from *pārûš*, meaning “set apart.”

32 Eldin Villafañe, *Beyond Cheap Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 32.

them to come out as a finished product that we can then put back into a ministry context to “bear fruit.” Villafañe further comments:

I continue to be convinced that the focal point of all Christian theology that merits such a name is the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. This does not mean methodologically that all theology must begin with Christology. It is possible to begin with the Trinitarian doctrine (Barth, Bonaventure), with the unity of God (Thomas Aquinas), with the experience of grace (Luther), with the doctrine of man (Reinhold Niebuhr), with the experience of dependence (Schleiermacher), etc., etc. But always, in all these cases and in any other, the focal point by which one must judge all theology is how it understands that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.”³³

We need to develop Christocentric, incarnational models of leadership development if we are going to be consistent with our theological vision.

Mentoring relationships

Relational discipleship is what Jesus modeled. He did not work from textbooks, though they did exist in some form as the *Mishnah* and *Talmud* even in the first century. Jesus did not devise a list of doctrines based on a linear and bounded-set way of thinking. He mentored his followers in a living relationship. It may be important to reflect here on the fact that Jesus did not leave any written record. He modeled faithfulness and obedience in front of his followers. Jesus loved and poured himself into their lives. He taught them how to relationally encounter the living God.

This is the same method of leadership development that Paul used. In his letters to Timothy, he displays this kind of familial language: “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:1–2). In the same way, Paul refers to Titus as “my true son in our common faith.” Paul spent significant time with these young leaders and then continued to send ongoing instructions through their correspondence, which included detailed descriptions to aid in their own development of new leaders in this growing grassroots movement.

In the end, the fruitful Christian leader must develop the mind of Christ, which cannot be taught in a classroom—by that, I mean a mindset that is not motivated by self-interest, but which reflects the kenotic, self-emptying love of God. As Villafañe so adequately states,

But above all Paul challenges them, and us, to a Christian mind-set—to the mind of Christ, a mind informed by the cross. This is a challenge that Paul underlines throughout the epistle and that he highlights in 2:5, when he exhorts them to “let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (KJV). The word “mind” is from the Greek *phroneo*, which means “think of,” “be desposed,” “attitude,” or “mind-set.” In Pauline strategy, and I may add divine strategy, this Greco-Roman city, like all our cities, needed a clear and concrete witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ—a witness that is the result or consequence of a Christian mind-set.³⁴

The Christian leader must be one who is willing to live a “cruciform” and sacrificial life, one who is willing to be poured out as a sacrament—a visible sign of God’s love and grace.

Through this broad investigation of the biblical text, we have discovered that we need to develop an intentional process to disciple the next generation. We need to learn from the generational dynamics of immigrant communities. Without intentionality, an entire generation might grow up not knowing the Lord or participating in his salvation story. Perhaps we should begin by integrating children and youth back into the heart of the faith community rather than

³³ Ibid., 31.

³⁴ Ibid., 7.

relegating them to far corners of our facilities so as not to disturb our adult population. This will create an environment for organic relationships to develop in which we might identify and call out the God-given potential in the lives of others. As the community discerns specific gifts and skills, we then need ways to communicate, call, and cultivate these abilities. A mentoring relationship should develop within the context of a covenant community who together seek to “do the Bible.”

Mission action

Augustine understood theological reflection as “*crede, ut intelligas*,” or “believe so that you may understand.” Anselm used a similar phrase: *fides quaerens intellectum*. Both Augustine and Anselm described theology as a kind of “faith seeking understanding.” As Torrance states,

In theology we have knowledge of an objective reality in which we hear a Word, encounter a *Logos*, from beyond our subjective experience, a Word which utters itself in our listening to it and speech of it, a Word which speaks for itself in guiding us to ever deepening understanding of the objective reality, and to which we submit our subjective experience for constant criticism and control.³⁵

Theology is our knowledge of the Lord God who has revealed himself to us. We begin to articulate and cognize things that we know experientially. This is simply faith seeking understanding.

The mission theologian engages the theological enterprise differently from the biblical or dogmatic theologian in that the mission theologian is always in search of a “habitus.”³⁶ The goal of the mission theologian is to participate in the theological process through reflection and action. This is a fully relational understanding of theology.³⁷ We are engaged in an ongoing hermeneutical circle between experience/action and biblical/theological reflection. If we fail to engage this circle fully, then we will have nothing to offer the city. This article has been an exercise in the hermeneutical circle of action and reflection, seeking deeper insight into the emerging theme of leadership development in the urban context.

Our end goal is that the presence of the Lord permeate the city. As Linthicum aptly puts it,

[T]he name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE. The prophet Ezekiel puts it very simply in that statement—God’s intention for the city is that the Lord will be there. . . . The Lord will permeate the life and activities and even the spiritual essence of that city that its very name will proclaim that God is found inside the city’s walls.³⁸

It is the same eschatological vision that we see in Isaiah 11:9, accompanied by a powerful image of peace: “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, *for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea*” (Isa 11:9, emphasis added). To live into that powerful vision, we need to develop a discipleship process that is consistent with a living system theology. We need to understand how discipleship actually happens.

In light of a living system theology, we learn that the works model does not work. As part of a fallen world, our vision is imperfect. Our attempts to respond to issues tend only to make the problems worse. “It has been put best by the comic strip character Pogo the Possum. He said, ‘We have met the enemy—and he is us!’”³⁹ Our discipleship and leadership development programs have often created more problems than solutions.

³⁵ T. F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (New York, T & T Clark, 1996), 48.

³⁶ Van Engen, *God So Loves the City*, 260.

³⁷ I would say that this conception of the theological task fits in harmoniously with the Wesleyan understanding of the theological task for any and all of the “distinct” theological disciplines.

³⁸ Linthicum, *City of God / City of Satan*, 80.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

We need to enter in through poverty and weakness. As Bresee once stated,

There is something marvelously strange in the history of the Christian Church. Persecuted, bleeding, dying, she draws strength from her own blood, and, by the hand of God, puts on power in the midst of weakness. But, becoming strong, powerful, influential, she, in turn, becomes the oppressor and persecutes the same truth for which she has been persecuted. Its triumph becomes the ruin of its Spiritual life; its strength becomes the strength of the oppressor. Thus, the history is over and over again repeated itself.⁴⁰

Power is made perfect in weakness. For us to participate in the redemptive process, we must begin with repentance.

The process of the gospel, as illustrated by Hall, is the process of discipleship described above. We must create opportunities for observation and intentional relationship development. We begin with perceived needs. The relational connection is deepened and empowerment begins as we meet those perceived needs together. Then, we begin to engage the more basic needs for *transcendence* (spiritual), *significance* (physical), and *community* (social). Through this process, people are then equipped and empowered to disciple others. This all happens within the context of faith communities engaged in the four mission actions described by Villafaña: kerygma (*proclamation*), koinonia (*fellowship*), diakonia (*service*), and leitourgia (*worship*).⁴¹

Retelling the story: Tori

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Gal 6:7–10)

We reap what we sow. If we sow apple seeds, we are not going to get grapefruits. And if we plant tomatoes, we will not receive watermelons. Some have attempted to define this principle as karma. They understand this concept in a slightly different way, but we know it as a biblical principle: the Creator ordered this relational world in such a way so that we reap what we sow. We are part of an organic, living system.

Pastors and ministry leaders are in the farming business. We plant seeds, and those seeds take time to germinate, grow roots, and develop before they begin to produce fruit. The right environment is needed for life to flourish. “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow” (1 Cor 3:6–9).

In light of Jeremy’s murder, I had the sense that I had utterly failed as a youth pastor in our community. Even though I was no longer in that role, the fact that one of the youths who had been involved in our ministry would participate in such a senseless act of violence led me to the brink of despair. Several other teens had fallen away. A few had been arrested. Others had already started families at a young age, outside of the context of a faithful, covenant relationship. I was not sure that our engagement in the neighborhood was making any substantial difference. Then, out of the blue, one of our former youth group members who is currently incarcerated contacted me.

Tori became involved in a gang some time after my wife and I moved to Kansas City to attend Nazarene Theological Seminary. We were in Kansas City for five years before I returned as the lead pastor of this ministry. Tori was arrested for participating in a drive-by shooting. He is serving an

40 P. F. Bresee, “Persecution,” *The Nazarene Messenger* 6:2 (September 19, 1901).

41 Eldin Villafaña, *The Liberating Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 216–21.

extended sentence in federal prison. Somehow, he found out that I was back in the area and called me. We have continued a correspondence through letters, email, phone calls, and visits. Tori is deeply involved in a prison ministry. He is leading a vital bible study. I am blessed by his current involvement in ministry and hopeful about his potential for future leadership in the church.

We are doing our best to understand organic principles in a living system theology and to put them into practice. We must remind ourselves constantly that what may appear to be success in the short term may actually lead to long-term failure. In the same way, what appears to be failure in the short term may actually lead to fruitful, vibrant ministry. We have several new children and youths who are displaying signs of great leadership potential. As we integrate living system principles into the life of our fellowship I have great hope for our future. We are working with biblical and organic principles, therefore, we do not give up, for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest.

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Living System Ministry in Practice

COZ CROSSCOMBE

I first encountered Living System Ministry (LSM) while taking a class at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME) with Professors Hall and Bose. I was fascinated at this seemingly new approach to looking at complex urban systems, especially given the "Quiet Revival" happening in Boston. Being a skeptic, I was not convinced that LSM would work in all contexts, and certainly not convinced that it would work in Philadelphia, a city far larger and more distressed than Boston.

I had my first opportunity to teach some of the LSM principles to a small group of friends and ministry partners later that year. We were considering what might be done to increase the effectiveness of leadership development in our community. The group was quite diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, and experience, some working in ministry, others not. As we spent time together, many of the principles of LSM began to shine out. We noted that missionaries were coming into our community, mostly to plant churches, and often bringing extensive outside resources. There would be great fanfare about how they were going to transform the community and bring hope to the destitute. Years later, these same missionaries, if they lasted that long, would still be running the ministry themselves, rarely producing effective leaders, and with the community still as broken as when they arrived. Was there a way to understand this phenomenon through the lens of Living System Ministry?

Philadelphia: history and situation

It would help at this point, I think, to describe the context in which these conversations began. Philadelphia is a complex urban center surrounded by a growing metropolitan region. It has a long and detailed history, leading the nation in both positive and negative ways.

Philadelphia was designed to be the new Utopia, an open city, by William Penn, its founder. Yet, even Penn himself chose not to live in the city proper, instead residing on his country estate.¹ Philadelphia is a city of neighborhoods, with more than four hundred officially on record and hundreds more known to the local residents of those neighborhoods. Philadelphia's population is just over 1.5 million, but the metropolitan region² has almost 6 million residents.³

After huge population declines and periods of stagnation through the 1980s and 1990s, Philadelphia is once more a growing city in a growing state, with much of the growth coming from Latino and Asian immigration.⁴ There are waves of young people, mostly white, moving in to the city's inner neighborhoods such as Northern Liberties, Fairmount, Brewerytown, Fishtown, and Center City South. There are also older retirees coming back to the city, both white and black, rebuilding formerly dilapidated communities in South and West Philadelphia.⁵ The University of

1 Steven Conn, *Metropolitan Philadelphia: Living with the Presence of the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 32.

2 The metropolitan region can be defined as Philadelphia County and the eight counties that border Philadelphia: Bucks County (PA), Montgomery County (PA), Chester County (PA), Delaware County (PA), New Castle County (DE), Gloucester County (NJ), Camden County (NJ), and Burlington County (NJ).

3 United States Census 2010, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/42/4260000.html>, accessed April 1, 2012.

4 United States Census 1990, 2000, and 2010, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/42/4260000.html>, accessed April 1, 2012, and "A City Transformed: The racial and ethnic changes in Philadelphia over the last 20 years," The Philadelphia Research Initiative, http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Philadelphia_Research_Initiative/Philadelphia-Population-Ethnic-Changes.pdf, accessed April 1, 2012.

5 These trends are taken from research projects through Common Grace, Inc., using a combination of applied research

Pennsylvania and its neighboring higher education institutions, including Temple University, have all created their own communities with their own police forces and urban development priorities. Philadelphia's baseball and football teams sell out their stadiums for every game, bringing tens of thousands of people into the city. Philadelphia's hospitals and universities are constantly cited amongst the best in the nation, with a reported one in six doctors in America having completed some of their training in the Philadelphia area.

To many people, especially those who live outside the city limits, Philadelphia provides all they could want in a metropolitan capital: great higher education, dedicated medical professionals, winning sports teams, modern and historical arts, and the largest urban parklands in America, all easily reached by a road system designed for the suburbanite to access the best of Philadelphia without ever encountering the issues facing the city.

These issues are many and incredibly complex. Philadelphia's public schools are a disaster, with a graduation rate below 50 percent for black and Latino males⁶—reported to be the lowest in the nation. In 2011, there were more than 4,500 reported assaults in the schools and hundreds more that were not reported.⁷ Some schools have become so terrible that the school board has handed them over to become charter schools in hopes that the charters could do something that the public schools have been so miserably failing to do. In the recent handover of Olney High School, students were assessed to have an average of a second-grade reading level. In September 2011, as the school year began, a group of private philanthropists raised around a half million dollars to buy out the contract of the school superintendent so that she would leave. The schools are technically run by the state, meaning the city can in many ways deny the schools as their responsibility. The state, at the same time, has no local accountability from the residents of Philadelphia, with the school board being entirely appointed (the only school board in Pennsylvania not voted in by local residents). Here begin the complexities of Philadelphia's issues.

Philadelphia has more than 8,000 children under the care of the Department of Human Services (DHS), whose job is to ensure the safety of children from parental abuse. Forty-two percent of children in Philadelphia who enter DHS's care and are later reunified with their families reenter care within twelve months.⁸ There are around 660 children waiting for immediate adoption in Philadelphia. These adoptions are not only free, but the adoptive parents receive a substantial monthly stipend and free medical services for the child until they reach the age of 18. DHS workers say the number 660 does not even present the true picture, as hundreds more children are not put up for adoption because DHS workers believe there is no point in doing it. This issue becomes even more complex when we consider that the DHS budget of \$550 million comes mostly from the state and federal governments on a matching ratio of 10 to 1. This creates a classic systems issue where reducing the city's spending by \$1 loses the city \$10 in state and federal funding. Incentives to change the current state of affairs in child welfare in Philadelphia are greatly hindered by the potential negative returns of such changes.

Philadelphia averages close to one homicide per day, the majority of victims being young black males.⁹ In the 19124 zip code where I live, more than 600 prisoners are released back into the community each year at a cost of \$58 million.¹⁰ The majority of these prisoners return to a

and demographic data compiled by ESRI.

6 Martha Woodall, "Task force cites high dropout rates for African American, Latino students," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (September 3, 2010), B02. Print.

7 Dylan Purcell, "Taking a closer look at the numbers behind school violence," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 27, 2011, A23.

8 "The State of Child Welfare," The Porch Light Project, <http://www.porchlightproject.org/reports/socw10/StateofChildWelfare10.pdf>.

9 "Murder Analysis Philadelphia Police Department 2007–2010," Philadelphia Police Department Research and Planning Unit, July 2011, <http://www.phillypolice.com/assets/PPD.Homicide.Analysis.2007-2010.pdf>.

10 Justice Atlas of Sentencing and Corrections Web site, www.justiceatlas.org.

community that Common Grace Inc. refers to as the Twilight Zone—community caught between two other communities as a result of a historical deed restriction dating from the 1930s on one side and an elevated transit line on the other. Eight or so blocks were cut off from the surrounding communities and became “dumping grounds” for the prisons. Larger homes became ideal for illegal halfway houses and “drug rehabs.” Easy access to the “El” led to increased drug trafficking, and home ownership fell to 25 percent, as opposed to 75 percent in surrounding communities.¹¹

Philadelphia has been marred by public corruption for as long as anyone can remember. The previous mayor, John Street, had no problem speaking publicly of his policy of “pay to play,” giving city contracts to those contributing to his campaigns. Numerous city council members, state representatives, and city government workers have been indicted on corruption charges. Yet, Philadelphia’s population seems to be quite accepting of these systems, or perhaps just feels helpless. Back in 1903, Lincoln Steffens made a statement that still seems to ring true today: that Philadelphia is “no more corrupt than any other major American city, but what sets it apart is that people seem content with that corruption.”¹²

Philadelphians seem unable or unwilling to effect change in their failing systems. Herein lies what is perhaps Philadelphia’s greatest issue: most people in the city do not have any idea about how to change the systems in the city. Failing schools, violence, dilapidation (Philadelphia has more than 40,000 abandoned houses and 600 abandoned factories), government corruption, overcrowded prisons, a rampant illegal drug trade, and a lack of jobs seem far too complex for the average Philadelphian to tackle. There is also historical precedent for Philadelphian’s apathy, disillusionment, and inability to solve their city’s problems. In comparing Philadelphia to Boston, E. Digby Baltzell said,

Puritan Boston is a place with a low level of social tolerance and a correspondingly well-developed sense of civic responsibility on the part of its elite. Quaker Philadelphia, in contrast, is a place with a high level of social tolerance and a very low sense of civic responsibility among those who set out to be its leaders.¹³

The Quaker roots of Philadelphia’s supposed Utopia, the city of tolerance, have worked against it in more ways than one. Sam Warner wrote that this “privatism” of the Quaker, the personal independence, the accumulation of wealth, and the attention to one’s own family rather than the community have defined Philadelphia from the very beginning.¹⁴ Philadelphia was a leading city in the suburbanization of America, building housing developments that disconnected people both personally and socially from each other. With the flight of Philadelphia’s white middle class came an even further abandonment of the city’s woes. The interstate road systems created easy access to downtown offices, universities, and sports complexes. Those who did not have the means were left behind in the ruins of communities that had lost whatever leadership they previously had. The white flight was soon followed by black flight as the emerging black middle class now had the economic means to seek a better life.

The state of Philadelphia’s churches

Where is the church in the midst of this? Sadly, instead of leading the city in its times of greatest need, the church of Philadelphia seems to be more a reflection of the problems. Complex systemic issues have led to a church that finds itself also focused on individual wellbeing rather than corporate, or even better, kingdom prosperity. By many accounts, the church was the first

11 These trends are taken from research projects through Common Grace, Inc., using a combination of applied research and demographic data compiled by ESRI.

12 Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of Cities* (New York: Hill and Wang 1957), 136 (emphasis mine).

13 E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), ix–x.

14 Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 3–4.

institution to flee the declining Philadelphia community. Many of Philadelphia's church buildings sit empty on a Sunday morning. Bill Krispin describes Philadelphia as the place where more denominational splits took place than anywhere else in the country, reflecting again a strong individualism. The churches in Philadelphia with the largest congregations are all regional churches with very little impact on the communities in which they are located. The majority of black pastors live in the surrounding suburbs rather than in the city. The black suburban church seems to have a far greater connection to the neighborhoods of Philadelphia out of which they came than does the white church, but it remains, for the most part, a disconnected entity. The majority of churches in Philadelphia function in a "tribal" or silo fashion, where their highest priority is to ensure their own success regardless of the cost to the churches around them. This is not a deliberate decision based upon evil intent, but rather a reflection of the complex system of Philadelphia in which the church finds itself.

Despite the millions of dollars poured into Philadelphia by a multitude of Christian missions, the most troubled communities have not been transformed. As I looked back over my own ministry of almost twenty years, I was forced to confess that little of what I had done seemed effective in producing long-term transformation. I have been blessed to be a part of, and sometimes lead, various ministries that have gained attention for being groundbreaking, cutting edge, and exciting. Yet, I still live in a community as dilapidated and violent as when I arrived. Yes, I have many stories of men and women whose lives have been forever transformed by the saving grace of Christ, but I also have many more stories of those who did not make it.

As I ran all this history and experience through the LSM lens, scenario after scenario, I found one consistent issue. Rarely did any ministries begin from a point of "positive appreciation" in regard to their community. People came in to "save the poor, feed the homeless, teach the uneducated." Churches were planted because "there were no Bible-believing churches in that area." Groups came in to "love those poor children" whose parents obviously did not care for them.

Why was there such an absence of positive appreciation? Because rarely did anyone take the time to truly observe the community. Someone might come in on a "vision trip" and spend a few days or even a few weeks looking around. Within that time, they could clearly see the surface issues of the community and read about the crime. What they could not see were the strengths of the community, the God-given gifts of the people, the ongoing work of the gospel, and the beauty hidden behind the ugliness of a seemingly abandoned neighborhood.

Applying Living System Ministry

I have had numerous opportunities to begin teaching LSM principles, especially as relates to observation. I currently teach some classes at the Center for Urban Theological Studies (CUTS), a sister school in many ways to CUME. My focus is on the church in the community, teaching students to exegete their communities in order to best develop ways for their church to be relevant to the people in that context. The first stage for the students is to learn research techniques and how to unpack what one sees, all while believing that God has blessed every people group within the city with the gifts and talents needed for his kingdom to come on earth.

I had my first opportunity to guide a ministry using LSM about a year after first hearing about the system. It was to be a small ministry, and I thought it provided an excellent opportunity to test whether LSM could really work.

A talented and enthusiastic young man, Dan, wanted to come to Philadelphia to start a community bike shop and related ministries. Dan grew up moving around, as his dad was in the military, but he saw Colorado Springs as his home. He loved all things outdoors: he was a river rafting guide in the summer and an avid and talented cyclist. His initial plan was to find a building in a high-needs community, open the shop, and go at it. I saw great potential in the concept, since

cycling was a common denominator among several people groups. The poor may cycle out of necessity to get to work. The wealthy may cycle as a hobby. The middle-aged cycle to get in shape. Some cycle as a sport. For everyone, though, cycling gives a sense of freedom. This is evident to me on the face of every kid riding off his block for the first time. Could cycling be a bridge between people in our area? Would the doctors on their way to work at the local clinic ride with the guy on the street? Would a cyclist from an affluent suburb come into the city for a group ride with some young men from the neighborhood, resulting in relationships that could lead to transformation for all involved?

Dan, being young and enthusiastic, wanted to open the shop within three to six months. I committed to help him on the condition that we would take an LSM approach, stating that the observation phase alone could take a year or more, and that he should not expect to start anything formally for at least a year and a half. As testament to Dan's humility, he agreed to this, trusting that I knew what I was doing. I was concerned that if LSM did not work in practice, Dan could be hurt and a potentially great ministry would be wrecked before it even got off the ground. Doug Hall's words, "You always need to look for the unintended negative consequences," resounded in my head.

I began with Dan by helping him make connections in the community. He needed to find a good church home for support, which he quickly did, landing at a house church connected with a strong mother church, Spirit and Truth. Their fellowship was diverse and their leadership local. Dan then found a job working in a bike shop in a different community, where he could better see and understand how bikes and community interacted. The shop had community programming, which Dan also worked in. He began to develop friendships that could speak into his life. Although he still found great affinity with others like himself—relocators who loved the outdoors—Dan had no choice but to see the strengths in the community. At various stages, we would have conversations about these topics, about why people do the things they do. I saw as one of my roles to constantly challenge Dan to not see "outsiders" as having what "locals" needed.

Often, Dan was frustrated by the city and its people. Why did people play their music so loudly on such a small block? Why did they block traffic by stopping their cars in the middle of the street when they could have just pulled over a bit further along to have their conversation? Why was there so much garbage on the street? In Dan's first year, he had his car stolen, his bike stolen, his computer stolen, and his phone stolen.

It was a rough start, but Dan was not alone or unsupported. He was part of a solid fellowship, and he had numerous friends and a support structure. Dan did a few trial projects in conjunction with other local work. Instead of starting his own programming, he joined with a local faith-based community center to offer an earn-a-bike program, where kids receive a donated bike, but must learn how to service it and how to properly and safely ride it before they can keep it. He partnered with other local churches to run bike safety days, where he and other volunteers would go onto a block and set up a repair stand. Kids and adults could bring their bikes for a free safety check and adjustments. Dan organized and led group bike rides, often taking other young men on long rides starting in the city and travelling well outside into areas where many had never ridden before.

After more than eighteen months of observation and interaction, Dan has developed a true appreciation for the community. His shop location is strategically placed opposite a thriving church, next to where the Christian health center has built a new site that will see about 30,000 patient visits this year. He is in the same building as the Christian legal services office and rents from a Christian businessman who employs people as a means of ministering as well as providing. Dan now has a far greater chance of seeing true transformation take place, working in collaboration, not competition, as part of a local work, even if directed by an outsider.

The bike shop is called Simple Cycle, an apt name. Already, it has brought people together

who would otherwise not have gathered. It is the catalyst for a collaboration between the health center and a wellness center with plans to hold a health fair and community walk/run/cycle. It will be working with local schools on issues of childhood obesity, again in collaboration with the clinic and wellness center. Other churches are asking how they can become involved. Perhaps the most astounding collaboration has come with a partnership with another bike shop, located sixty miles away in Lancaster county on a farm, surrounded by fields. It looks more like a barn than a bike shop. The owners are the Shirk family, “horse and buggy” Mennonites who are known throughout the state for their cycling expertise. Not only do the Shirks sell and service bikes for the Mennonite community, they also deal with elite cyclists, selling high-end bikes and parts. Through a providential encounter some years ago, I came to know the primary owner, Luke Shirk. I would never have said we were friends, but he knew I lived and worked in the inner city, and on occasion he had donated a used bike for kid who had a bike broken or stolen.

I approached Luke one day, explained the concept of Simple Cycle, and asked if he would like to be involved. He told me he would consider it, but on the condition that people would not get anything for free but would need to earn things. His own work ethic was evident as I observed his young sons working in the shop. The city was a strange and foreign place to Luke, but he understood bikes and the biking culture, and agreed to donate used bikes to Simple Cycle. The bikes were accompanied by new parts to get them in order, and our conversations grew and grew. Luke has become interested in the work in Philly, and has even agreed to come and ride in the city with Dan and others. The contrast evident in this relationship stood out to me in a recent visit to the Shirk shop. Luke’s sons were moving buggies down the lane, by hand. It seemed so removed from chaos of our neighborhood to which I would return in just a few hours: children moving buggies versus bustling people, noise, cars—and bikes.

LSM is real. To me, it is not a theory, a new idea, or even just a concept. We can find creative solutions to complex urban issues, bringing people together in ways that lead to lasting transformation. A bike shop and cycling ministry seem very small in the scale of a city like Philadelphia, but the same principles and experiences Dan employed can be applied to solving issues like education and foster care. I find myself having frequent conversations with other ministry leaders about LSM and how we can apply it to their context. Suburban churches with which I have shared this are now rethinking their entire ministry strategies for the city, understanding the ineffectiveness of their previous programs and even damage they may have caused. A common question I am asked now is, “We want to help, but how do we make sure we do not do any damage?” Collaboration meetings now always include time considering potential unintended negative consequences and strategies for how we might avoid or minimize them.

What better place could we find to introduce a living system theology than a city like Philadelphia? If the church can see itself as one church, one body, an organic structure in an organic system, then the church has the capacity to change this system. With an estimated 3,000 churches in the city of Philadelphia, finding permanent homes for 660 children does not seem that daunting. With around 150,000 people in church on a given Sunday, developing a support structure to reintegrate several thousand prisoners back into society may not be so difficult. With unified churches, reaching new immigrants with the changing power of the gospel seems achievable, creating the potential for every man, woman, and child to have multiple opportunities to hear and respond to the gospel. Increased relationships among clergy have the potential of bringing a new sense of kingdom focus where churches will celebrate not their own successes, but kingdom gains, even if the gains happen at the church down the street.

Coz Crosscombe is an Australian who has lived and ministered in Philadelphia for the past twenty years. Coz is married to Joyce, who is far more talented than her husband and has achieved more than he can even dream. They have four children who are all of mixed culture: Saiyeh, Melanie, Emma, and Tony. Coz is the director of the microscopic group Common Grace, dedicated to helping churches strategically come together to do more together than they could do alone.

Pennies for the Needy: A Case Study in Living System Ministry

Michele Mitsumori

In 2008–2009, Workneh Tesfaye was a student in the course “Inner City: A Context for Ministry” offered by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME) and Emmanuel Gospel Center (EGC). His course project was a proposal for Pennies for the Needy, a ministry outreach to Ethiopians in the Cambridge/Boston area with the focus of raising funds to send orphans in Ethiopia to school. In 2010, he approached EGC to use space for prayer meetings and fellowship for supporters of the ministry. As a member of the teaching team for the Inner City Ministry course at the time and as facilities manager for EGC, I have watched how Workneh began then and has continued to incorporate Living System Ministry principles into his thinking and project implementation. Impressed, I thought to use his ministry as an example of Living System Ministry in practical ministry. This case study is based on interviews with Workneh Tesfaye and with Daniel Abire, the treasurer of Pennies for the Needy and a brother of Workneh.

From a tiny seed

In 2007, Workneh recalls being in the kitchen while his two sons, Nathan and Caleb, were watching TV in the living room. He overheard his younger son Caleb comment, “Those kids [on TV] are so skinny and scary.” The show was a documentary about Sudanese and Ethiopian children, many of whom were starving. Caleb’s words upset Nathan, and Workneh intervened and explained that many of the children had lost their parents, and that was why they were hungry. His younger son ran into his room and returned with his piggy bank. “When Grandma returns to Ethiopia [on an upcoming trip], I’m going to give her this money to give to those kids,” he vowed. Then his older brother did the same. Workneh added some money of his own, and in total their grandmother took \$50 with her to Ethiopia, where Workneh’s sister, Berket Tesfaye, a children’s minister at their home church in Harar, used the money to buy books and uniforms for two children living with their grandmother and unable to afford school. The money also paid for their school fees for half a year. Berket told him, “Nathan and Caleb are doing a good thing, but don’t undermine it. You need to think about the second semester.” The Tesfaye family galvanized, and as the families of Workneh’s two brothers and brother-in-law pooled their funds, with Berket’s help coordinating the support in Harar, in 2008–2009 they were able to send seven children to school.

Surfacing and engaging mental models

During this time, Workneh had been pursuing his master’s degree in urban ministry through CUME. An elder responsible for teaching and materials development at the Evangelical Ethiopian Church (EEC) in Boston since 2002, and previously an elder at the Full Gospel Church in Hara, Workneh initially attended seminary to develop his teaching skills. But as he learned about other areas such as holistic ministry and international missions, a vision began to gather power within him. A significant person in helping bring this vision to reality was Judy Hall, who, as a professor of the Inner City Ministry course, encouraged him to use his idea for the course’s ministry proposal project.

One of the first challenges was in surfacing and engaging different mental models about the work of the church. Mental models are “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even

pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.”¹ They, as well as their effects on our behavior, are often unconscious. Workneh described a core mental model of the evangelical church he grew up with in Ethiopia: that the main responsibility of the church is to save souls. The government and secular organizations exist to address physical needs. Under the traditional model, if someone is sick, a Christian should pray for that person, as God is the ultimate healer. Taking that person to the hospital might reflect a lack of faith.

Stimulated by his seminary courses and reflecting on his lifelong passion for helping others, however, Workneh developed the mental model that people must be reached not only through preaching and teaching, but that different issues, including material needs, must also be addressed. The difference between the two mental models pushed him to fortify his vision systemically, including developing a solid biblical foundation starting from passages such as James 1:27, which speak about loving the poor.

This past January, Berket and other volunteers in Harar invited the extended families of the supported children to a small event at the church, where they served food, explained about the ministry, and showed a film about Jesus Christ. Although the leaders of Full Gospel Church helped organize it, it was difficult for them to attend because the event was on Christmas Day (celebrated in Ethiopia on January 7 that year). Most of the family members were Muslim, and after seeing the film, twenty-four of them rose up to follow Christ. When the pastors of the church were asked to minister to these new converts, they were amazed at the power of this simple event. Workneh reflected, “[There was] no preaching, just showing the movie about Christ on a screen and introducing our ministry of Pennies for the Needy.” But the families were able to understand that “we are helping them because of the love of Christ, we don’t discriminate: we are open to any person who is very poor, and we follow the government’s regulations.” Since then, fifteen of the family members have joined a six-month weekly course in basic Christian teaching at the church. The event helped to demonstrate how a holistic ministry such as Pennies for the Needy can serve as an outreach tool.

A second, perhaps even stronger mental model is the sense that the physical needs of the people are vast while the church’s resources are scarce. How can one church address needs such as hunger, lack of education, and families broken by war? The broadness of the problem can cause paralyzing fear. Some may feel that only large international ministries such as Compassion International and World Vision have the resources to make a difference.

In the same way that the church in Macedonia, though poor itself, contributed to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, Workneh encouraged those he knew: “Let’s say we just have pennies. But let’s start with the pennies and do something with the pennies.” As he shared what his two sons had started, his extended family in Boston joined, and then a few more people beyond that circle. Several were strangers he met while driving his taxi. The practical opportunity to make a difference, even with the minimal resources represented by pennies, helped to transform their mental models about their helplessness. The realization that this sense of fear and helplessness had to be addressed is part of what led Workneh to name the ministry Pennies for the Needy (PfN).

Anticipating counterproductivity

In appreciating the complexity of their endeavor, Workneh and his team also considered their potential for counterproductivity. One of the requirements for the Inner City Ministry course’s ministry proposal project was to analyze two ministries similar to the proposed initiative. One of the models studied by Workneh was the Phares Orphanage Center (POC). He interviewed Pastor Abraham T. Desta, one of POC’s founders. Pastor Abraham described two approaches that POC

1 Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 8. *The Fifth Discipline*, together with Douglas Hall, et al., *The Cat and the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), are core texts in the course.

had tried. The first, the institutional approach, cared for children within a compound where the children interacted primarily with orphanage staff. This isolation, however, contributed to the children's feeling that they had been rejected by their community, and they perceived themselves as outcasts. Some of the children became aggressive and lacking in compassion, characteristics that continued into their adulthood. The second approach, community-based, places the orphans in the care of relatives or guardians in the community under a daycare model. This model is both less costly and more beneficial to the orphans over the course of their entire lives.² Insights such as these led Pennies for the Needy to select children who are willing to live with any of their extended families, even their neighbors. The children "have to think they are a part of the community and can [grow to] be productive in their community," Workneh explained. "I came to this understanding, and never planned to have a center."

Roughly three years into the program, Pennies for the Needy is evaluating how the children are doing. One of the ways in which the program monitors progress is through volunteer social workers who visit the children in the contexts of their families and their schools on at least a monthly basis. They have reported that the children seem to have good interactions with their families, and many have solidly integrated. At school, the children are actively participating and among their peers exhibit no negative behaviors such as self-consciousness about being orphans or feelings of inferiority or exclusion. Workneh and the PfN team in Boston feel the approach has been effective, and in 2012, despite escalating costs in Ethiopia, have set themselves the ambitious goal of raising enough funds to increase their support from the current twenty-five children to thirty.

Furthermore, Workneh wanted to avoid creating dependency on the part of the children or their families as a result of the support PfN provided, which included food such as cooking oil and grain. Daniel Abire, the treasurer of PfN, shared that their goal is to support the children until they finish high school. Those who will not go on to college will be trained in microenterprise so that they could perhaps open a small shop or booth and be able to support themselves. Workneh is also exploring options for making PfN self-sufficient and less vulnerable to the vagaries of donations, such as collecting used computers to create a computer center in the kindergarten, the first computerized kindergarten in Harar. This feature might attract wealthy parents who usually send their children to the capital Addis Abba, thereby enabling PfN to generate income through tuition.

Seeking alignment with the living system

Doug Hall defines a living system as a "self-organized, highly complex, and highly interrelated collection of living parts that work together to accomplish a high-level goal when in proper relationship to each other."³ Social systems count as living systems as well.⁴

An appreciation for the interdependence of social systems was also something Workneh gained from learning about Living System Ministry. "You can't do things by yourself," he explained, "whatever resources you might have. We might think we are independent, but we are together." This insight that Workneh has gained into his own mental model regarding task of the church as the body of Christ has led him to greatly revise his view of church mission in the world. He found that, in order to see his new mental model in action, he would need to invest in creating a worship environment for the PfN team and like-minded colleagues. This led to the creation of the Emmanuel Disciples Fellowship, which allows the PfN team to gather to pray, worship, and engage in Bible study. They also have a venue to which to invite others, particularly non-Christians, who are interested in learning more about PfN, including its basis in God's love for the poor.

Workneh contends, "At any condition you have to live in harmony with the system. . . . We [all]

2 Workneh Tesfaye, "Ministry Proposal Project: Penny for the Needy (PfN) Ministry" (MC622 Inner City: A Context for Ministry, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 6 April 2009) 10–12.

3 Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, and Steve Daman, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 58–59.

4 Ibid., 59.

have the same label ‘Christian’ across our foreheads. So whatever I do, if I do something wrong, it is painful for both of us. Socially, we are interrelated—spiritually, in all ways, all around.” In a highly complex, highly interrelated collection of living parts, it can take time for a new equilibrium to be established after a change. But through continued interactions, the encouragement of others, prayer, and patience in God’s timing, he is convicted that God will bring about a new harmony, and then “the floodgates will open.”

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Shared Worship Space: An Urban Challenge and a Kingdom Opportunity

Bianca Duemling

The essence of Living System Ministry is to develop tools and find leverage points to nurture the vitality of the urban church and align with God's living system design as we work in the city. Shared worship space is an excellent example to illustrate why understanding and practicing Living System Ministry principles, as well as working with the broader system, is essential for the growth of the kingdom of God.

Factors contributing to the need of shared worship space

Sharing worship space¹ is a reality in the urban context, because space is very expensive and limited in availability. During the "white flight" of the 1960s, many congregations moved to the suburbs. Consequently, the number of majority-culture² churches in many North American cities declined. At the same time, the "Quiet Revival"³ unfolded and spiritual vitality flourished among immigrants in Boston. On every corner, new immigrant congregations emerged, often as house churches or in storefronts of former shops. More recently, there has been a new wave of young church planters who intentionally move into the city to plant churches.⁴

As congregations grow and need more space, they look for alternatives. Some rent space in office buildings, hotels, or schools,⁵ but most reach out to congregations that own buildings requesting to share space. Lack of space and financial means make it very difficult to find appropriate worship space in the city. Consider the following facts about sharing space in Boston/Cambridge/Brookline:⁶

- 32 percent of all congregations share worship space, in total 214 congregations.
- 73.6 percent of these congregations share with one other congregation.
- 16.1 percent of these congregations share with two other congregations.
- 10.3 percent of these congregations share with four or more congregations.
- 82.8 percent of these congregations share with congregations of a different denomination.
- 17.2 percent of these congregations with congregations of the same denomination.
- 95 percent of these congregations share with congregations comprised of people from a different ethnic background.

1 This article is based on a research project on shared worship space done by Intercultural Ministries at Emmanuel Gospel Center, which was published in the *Emmanuel Research Review* 74 (January 2012), 7.

2 In this article, the term "majority culture" refers to the United States society in general and not to the majority or minority in a given community or congregation. Majority culture is shaped by language, religious practice, values, and social structure of people of predominantly Euro-American descent.

3 See Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, and Steve Daman, *The Cat and the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), xiii–xv, and Doug Hall: "What Is the Quiet Revival and Why Is it Important?," *New England's Book of Acts* (2007), www.newenglandsbookofacts.org. The growth of immigrant churches is also documented in *New England's Book of Acts*.

4 This is an observation made by Ralph Kee made in his work with the Greater Boston Church Planting Collaborative (<http://www.egc.org/GBCPC>).

5 Renting space in schools is not possible everywhere anymore. On December 5, 2011, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal to hold worship services in a public school in New York City. Consequently, more than sixty churches in New York needed to relocate as of February 12, 2012. James Vicini, "Supreme Court Rejects Worship at Public School Appeal," Reuters Web site, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/05/us-usa-religion-schools-idUSTRE7B41ML20111205>, accessed January 10, 2012.

6 Data from the Boston Church Directory, Emmanuel Gospel Center Web site, www.egc.org/churches, accessed June 2011.

The proximity of diverse congregations when sharing worship space offers a great potential to connect across ethnic lines and to be a witness to the surrounding neighborhood of the beauty of unity in diversity. The reality, however, shows that sharing worship space is very challenging. It often causes much frustration for the congregations involved. The purpose of this article is to enhance the understanding of the dynamics and challenges arising from the sharing of worship space and to help congregations develop healthy and supportive relationships with each other so that the unity of the body of Christ may be manifested across ethnic lines. If sharing worship space is to work properly, it needs investment and commitment; there is no simple solution to the unique challenges presented by different situations.

First, I will explore the reasons and value of shared worship space from a biblical perspective. Second, I will address cultural differences and how the power imbalance in our society impacts sharing worship space. Finally, I will talk about how to share worship space and the different aspects of sharing space that must be considered.

A biblical perspective on sharing worship space

The Bible gives many examples that can be used to understand how essential shared worship space is for the body of Christ and how closely connected it is to the identity that Jesus wants for his disciples and his church. Five interconnected biblical principles, which are embedded in LSM, should be considered in the context of shared space and the body of Christ.

The body of Christ: a loving relationship

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the church as one interconnected body of Christ. He especially mentions the nature of the relationship in verses 24–26: “But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”⁷ The broader system of the body is considered first, taking into account that the suffering or honor of one part is reflected in each part.

In line with this image of the body is Jesus’ new commandment to love one another (John 13:34–35). Love is always more than words. Love implies consequences, as described in 1 Corinthians 13. Love also means to humbly serve one another, as stated in Galatians 5:13.

Moreover, sharing housing, food, and economic resources was characteristic of the early church, as described in Acts 4. We often hear Christians today express a desire to become like the early church again. Sharing worship space is an opportunity to return to the characteristics of the early church and put them into practice. Through sharing, unity is manifested in the diverse body of Christ.

Missional impact

Jesus emphasized the missional impact of unity in his prayer in John 17:21 shortly before he was crucified. He prayed for the unity of all believers, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” There is a close connection between “being one” and “that the world may believe.” This verse states very clearly that unity is a key to renewal and revival. Moreover, sharing worship space, especially across ethnic lines, is a witness to the community that Jesus is relevant today. He bridges the gap of segregation and brings peace and reconciliation.

Opportunity for spiritual growth

Sharing worship space might not increase a church’s growth numerically, but it can surely enhance spiritual growth and maturity. It is very easy to talk about a Christlike life from one’s own comfort zone. Sharing worship space involves stepping out of the comfort zone and gives an

⁷ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version.

opportunity to put the gospel into practice and to show how seriously a congregation lives out the fruit of the Spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5:22–23. Hence, sharing worship space is an opportunity to manifest a deeper kind of unity that surpasses the state of simply being kind to each other.

Interaction with Christians from all over the world challenges the cultural elements of our Christian practices and leads us to focus on the essential Christian faith. Mutual mentoring and encouragement as well as learning from each culture's strengths help us to mature in Christ. Sharing space with other believers is an excellent and humbling way to embrace our own cultural poverty.⁸ Additionally, if space is shared with immigrant groups, there is the potential of increased understanding of the global kingdom of God as well as affection for other parts of the world. Leaders and members can develop intercultural competency, a much-needed skill in our diversifying society.

Good stewardship

In the parable of the talents, the master entrusted his servants with money to invest wisely (Matt 25:14–30). In 1 Peter 4:10, it is explicitly expressed that “each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” A church building can be seen as talent of gold or a gift that should be used wisely for the sake of bringing life and the building of the kingdom of God.

Growing the kingdom of God

One of the great challenges of the body of Christ is to develop a kingdom perspective that extends beyond the walls of a congregation’s own activities. Congregations can expand their vision and be involved in advancing the kingdom of God through shared space by assisting a church plant or an immigrant congregation. Both church planting and the growth of an immigrant congregation are ways to nurture vitality through sharing space, and demonstrate an alignment with God’s desire to see unity in his body.

These Scripture passages and many more indicate that sharing worship space is not just a business deal between two independent parties, but also an undertaking within the one body of Christ. The primary focus when considering shared space should be the advancement of the kingdom of God. If growth occurs because a congregation has opened their space for a church plant, it has the same overall effect as if the same congregation added new believers to their own flock. In either case, it is for the advancement of the kingdom of God and the glory of God.

In order to accommodate new thinking about shared space, many congregations will need to shift their mental models. For example, a congregation that is not able to send out church planters can still be involved in church planting by sharing worship space. It needs to be understood that helping other congregations to fulfill their callings is a valid kingdom mission and ministry.

New mental models generate new and different questions. From a LSM perspective, it is a matter of asking the right question. Instead of asking, “How do I (or how does my congregation) get the job done?” the question should be, “How does the job get done?” Only then should a congregation explore their specific role in how the job might get done.⁹

Cultural differences and power imbalance

As mentioned above, more than 95 percent of congregations in the Boston area that share worship space share with a congregation of another ethnic background. There is a potential of conflict in every intercongregational interaction, but this potential increases in cross-cultural settings. Cultural misunderstandings and conflicts are inevitable in the context of intercultural encounters. It is helpful if everyone involved engages in a process of intercultural learning to

8 Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 116ff.

9 Ibid., 180–83.

increase intercultural competency. It is crucial to realize that, in addition to the fallen human condition, behavior is further impacted by cultural bias. Different approaches to cleanliness, time, and property do not exist to intentionally cause problems for the other congregation—they are cultural differences. This gives rise to a need to learn about patterns of foreign cultures without judging them, as well as identifying one’s own cultural standards and estimating their impact on someone from a different culture. In the context of LSM, we talk about primary and secondary culture as one framework to better understanding cultural differences. Most immigrants from the southern hemisphere are relational and come from a context of “primary culture,” whereas Western cultures can be described as “secondary cultures.” Here are some of the contrasts:¹⁰

Primary Culture	Secondary Culture
Relational need-satisfaction	Economic need-satisfaction
Extended family systems	Nuclear or adaptive families
Oral communication	Written communication
Informal learning	Formal learning
Spiritual explanations of reality	Scientific, objective, cognitive explanations of reality

These contrasts often create challenges and conflicts. It is a learning process to find ways to best work together and profit from each culture’s strengths.¹¹

The dynamic of majority/minority relations¹² also contributes to cultural challenges. Sharing worship space takes place in a context affected by power imbalance, systemic discrimination, and even racism in our society, which in the United States is rooted in colonization, the history of slavery, and the lack of equal opportunities for immigrants. As a result, mistrust and broken relationships exist between the members of majority and minority cultures. This historical baggage can deeply influence the relationships between congregations sharing space and is an especially sensitive issue, as most church building owners belong to the majority culture. The power imbalance might not be seen at first glance, but it subtly penetrates the atmosphere.

Aspects of sharing worship space

Sharing worship space is a very complex issue containing many challenges. Before dealing with practical details, our mental models need to be identified and some important questions must be asked. For example:

What is the motive to share worship space?

What attitude or mental model is driving the decision?

During my research, I observed that pastors who generally had good relationships with one another emphasized that the financial aspect of shared space should never be the driving motive. In some cases, a financial contribution is necessary to maintain the building. Even so, others admit that, when counting all the costs involved, in the end, there is no financial net gain. One way to prevent the financial aspect from dominating the process is to intentionally refrain from creating a landlord/tenant relationship, as the host congregation sets the tone of the shared worship space experience by default. Choice of terminology will help to identify the proper relationship:

¹⁰ Ibid., 19ff.

¹¹ For more on the impact of cultural differences, see Sarah A. Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures* (Hagerstown, MD: McDougal, 2000); Soong-Chang Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2010); and Ken Behnken, *Together in Mission: Sharing Facilities with Another Culture Group* (Irvine, CA: Center for United States Missions, 2008).

¹² In this article, the term “majority/minority relations” refers to United States society and its structure in general, not to the majority or minority in a given community or congregation.

Am I sharing or renting worship space?

Is it a business relationship or a relationship among brothers and sisters?

In any case, the host pastor sets the tone, but the guest congregation carries an equal responsibility to make the relationship work and not take advantage of the hospitality extended to them. In my observation, a business mentality where the financial aspect is the only or driving motive often becomes counterproductive. A business-contract approach often leaves misunderstandings and cultural conflicts unresolved, which can easily turn into destructive relationships and damage the body of Christ.

Sharing space is a learning process for everyone. The congregations involved need to be educated and to develop a shared vision emphasizing that the overall purpose is the kingdom of God, and not simply where the cups are located—which is nevertheless important!

Relationship is everything

Sharing worship space has similar aspects to living in community. In order to live well together, it is important to know each other's stories, vision, passion, hopes, and challenges. Building relationships is a long-term investment and cannot be accomplished in just one meeting to discuss practical details. However, over the long run, it is worth the initial investment to start on good terms, as it will help to navigate through any challenges that arise in the future. Therefore, transparent relationships, good communication, mutual respect, support, and responsiveness to each other needs are crucial.

Our research revealed that most pastors meet only if conflicts arise. It is not a good basis for relationships to only see each other when something goes wrong. Intentional efforts to build relationships through regular meetings for prayer and fellowship between the pastors or point-persons is critical to establishing a healthy basis for future conflict resolution. Our research also shows that quarterly meetings of an interchurch council that includes all groups involved have proven to be very beneficial, particularly in situations where multiple congregations share a church building.

Be prepared for challenges

Despite the formation of good relationships, challenges arise from time to time, often closely connected to cultural differences. Some of the challenges that frequently occur are different worship styles and sound levels as well as different standards regarding cleanliness, time, and supervision of children. Language barriers, historical and personal baggage, the smell of food, and unauthorized use of supplies and equipment are also challenges that congregations may face.¹³

Being aware of these challenges and addressing them up front can prevent the shared worship space experience from becoming counterproductive. Some challenges might be solved more easily than others, such as paying together for a cleaner or having a translator for conversations. But addressing most of these challenges means a lot of work, and all involved need the right attitude and willingness to make it work. An attitude of cooperation should not be held by only the leadership of the sharing churches, but also extend to each entire congregation. Conflicts need to be addressed with grace and love. Good communication principles of honesty and transparency must be employed. An overarching redemptive attitude and model¹⁴ needs to be constantly applied. If both the leadership and the congregants initially invest in developing strong relationships with each other, these relationships will help to navigate through challenges that arise.

Agreement

Since shared worship space arrangements are often cross-cultural, they thus often consist of encounters between oral or written cultures, which have different ways of coming to an agreement.

¹³ A more exhaustive list of challenges and their implications are listed in *Emmanuel Research Review* 74 (January 2012), www.egc.org/err74, accessed February 1, 2012.

¹⁴ Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 129–35.

In any negotiation, this oral-versus-written aspect has to be taken into account. As mentioned above, attitudes regarding sharing worship space are expressed through the terminology we choose to represent our thoughts; hence, it is recommended not to use business language such as “renting” or “contract.” In most cases, it is helpful to have the arrangement in a written form as a basis that can be revisited when there are misunderstandings. The “agreement” or “covenant” should be developed together and only contain the most basic information. It should support a good collaboration and avoid creating a “catalog of rules,” which implies distrust, reduces mental flexibility, and is less relational. In line with LSM, it is important to prioritize the vitality of the social system over the organizational structure.¹⁵

Working together toward an agreement gives the two congregations a chance to clearly communicate each other’s expectations. A common practice is to renew the agreement every year and see it as an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and adopt changes if necessary.

Since relationships are perhaps the key element to making an agreement work, I strongly suggest getting to know each other before you talk about agreement details. Sharing stories from the congregations as well as personal journeys in ministry can lead to rich conversations and pave the way for further interaction and relationship building.

Intercultural encounters and joint events

Sharing worship space is more than a functional relationship—it reflects the one body of Christ. Joint events are a visible expression that Jesus Christ connects people across cultural lines.

It is often the case that, even though a church building owner emphasizes that sharing worship space is building the kingdom of God, only a few congregations intentionally seek to build personal relationships with members of other congregations. The interaction is often reduced to the pastors or, at most, one joint service a year, if anything at all. Reasons cited are lack of time or the lack of enough space to hold joint events. Some pastors of guest congregations have indicated that they think any joint activity needs to be initiated by the host congregations, and therefore wait for an invitation that never comes.

Our research revealed that, although there are often good intentions to do something together, there is no driving motivation, so no one takes it on and starts to organize it. Whenever the time is invested and joint services or picnics do take place, everyone remembers it as a beneficial learning experience. It seems that, in the end, the lack of motivation to organize these enriching encounters stems from a general lack of understanding of the importance of building personal relationships across congregations, especially across cultural lines.

Besides the fact that it is personally and spiritually beneficial to develop intercultural relationships, the opportunity of outreach is immensely overlooked. A multicultural experience that reflects the love of Christ is very attractive, especially for young, urban non-Christians, as diversity reflects their life situation.

The following suggestions for joint events were provided by one of the congregations we interviewed as guiding principles for joint worship services:

- People from each congregation are involved in preparation.
- Short sermons are given in each language so that everyone has the experience of a ten-minute devotion in another language.
- Joint worship team with songs in different languages.
- Short interview/testimonies of one person from each congregation.
- Fellowship over a shared meal.

¹⁵ Ibid., 226ff.

Other possible joint events include:

- Vacation Bible School
- Soccer game
- Youth events
- Marriage seminars
- Community outreach events
- Building cleaning and repair event
- Yard sale for community outreach and to support the ministries

Conclusion: Is sharing worship space a long-term solution?

Given all the seemingly obvious reasons to share worship space, such as the difficult economic times we live in and the frequent lack of human, physical, and financial resources, I wonder why more congregations do not consider sharing worship space as a long-term solution.

I have observed that most churches in shared-space relationships ultimately desire their own buildings, even though they have good relationships with the host congregation. Sometimes, their desire stems from a need for more space, more flexibility, or the time slot that they must use to accommodate the other churches sharing the same space. For only two of the churches we interviewed, sharing worship space is a long-term option: one, because they have a high commitment to a specific neighborhood, and the other, because they place a high value on the shared worship arrangement for the opportunity it affords to spend its few resources on ministry and not on a building.

There is also a relationship aspect to why more churches do not commit to shared space. Cultural and personal misunderstandings will occur, and a long-term commitment to sharing worship space is also a commitment to invest in relationships, reconcile conflicts, and to not avoid difficult conversations.¹⁶

In spite of the challenges, it is time to think differently about sharing worship space. It is time to develop creative and innovative approaches that build the kingdom of God, witness a loving body of Christ, serve the neighborhoods, enhance intercultural learning, and reflect the nature of the kingdom of God as written in Revelation 7:9: “There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

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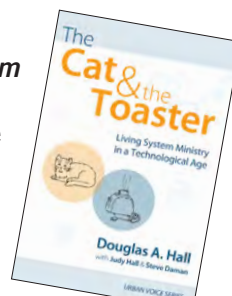
¹⁶ The article “Space Frontiers” features three churches that are pioneering new ways to use facilities for the gospel. It inspires the reader to think a little more creatively. Online at www.christianitytoday.com/le/2009/fall/spacefrontiers.html, accessed January 23, 2012. Intercultural Ministries of EGC offers consulting and training to assist congregations in navigating through cultural challenges.

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The Cat and the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age, by Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, and Steve Daman. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010. livingsystemministry.org/order



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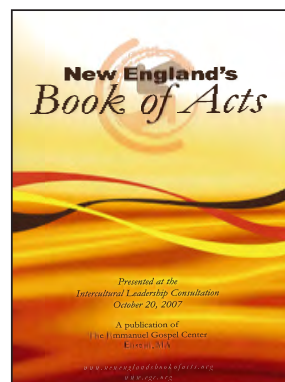
History of Revivalism in Boston, by Rudy Mitchell, senior researcher at the Emmanuel Gospel Center. Boston's awakenings and revivals from 1740 to 1950. January 2007. Online: egc.org/err24. Also in print.

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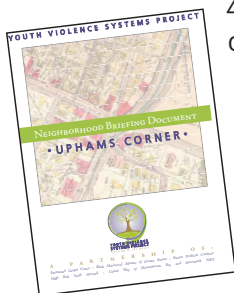
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New England's Book of Acts tells the amazing story of how the Kingdom of God is growing in New England as told by Christian leaders from various ethnic streams in New England today. October 2007. In pdf: newenglandsbookofacts.org. Also in print.



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- ***Awakening Your Inner Church Planter***, February 2011, 20 pp. Online in pdf: egc.org/awakening_inner_church_planter
- ***Diakonia, The Church at Work***, 1986, 28 pp. egc.org/diakonia-the-church-at-work

Reflections on *The Cat and the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* by Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, and Steve Daman (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010)

Brian D. John

The Cat and the Toaster is used as a text in the master's and doctoral urban ministry programs at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to explain the concept of Living System Ministry, a philosophy of urban ministry developed over thirty years by Doug and Judy Hall at the Emmanuel Gospel Center in Boston. My first impression of *The Cat and the Toaster* was one of uncertainty, as I could not make an immediate connection between a cat and a toaster. Several thoughts came to mind, none of which actually reflected heart of Living System Ministry, which seeks to educate and equip Christians on the ways they can minister to their urban context effectively. And, in fact, Living System Ministry (LSM) has tremendous implications that have helped me contextualize the work of ministry in my city.

The concepts found in *The Cat and the Toaster* are widely applicable—anyone can benefit from LSM. One key concept is to think through the differences between living systems/organisms and nonliving organizations and how these differences apply to ministry. Hall gives a practical illustration by citing the example of a toaster: If your toaster stopped working, you could simply take a screwdriver, remove the defective part, and replace it with a new part. Plug the toaster back in and it will work again. However, if your pet cat was sick, you could not take a screwdriver and take the cat apart, expecting it to live. It is not a machine; it is a living system—as is the church.¹

Indeed, one can find the principles of Living System Ministry from the beginning of time, when God created the earth as a living system. Organisms in creation are connected with other components that are different, yet interrelated as a whole. The Apostle Paul taught, “For even as we have many members in one body and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and several members one of another.”² The pursuit of seeing the church as an organism and not merely an organization is tantamount to the success of evangelizing the city.

This approach of viewing the church as an organism lends significant insight into how to do ministry in an urban setting. One key concept that has broadened my paradigm on Biblically-based ministry principles is the admonishment from the Halls not to be counterproductive. We gain some insight into this concept through the etymological derivation of “productive” and “counter.” “Productive” stems from a French and Latin phrase that means *fit for production*. “Counter” is also from the French which means *go against*, or *facing opposite*. To be counterproductive, then, means to take actions or do things in ministry that go against being fit for production.³

Counterproductivity is often very subtle; sometimes we can be counterproductive without seeing the damage it causes. Applying this concept led me to repent of the mindset I had been using to resolve issues in ministry. I thought that, in order to solve problems, all I had to do was be sincere and say a prayer, and that action would remove the problem. The spiritual discipline of prayer was not the problem. My problem was thinking of the present issue as an isolated incident that was not connected to other interrelated incidents. Being sincere is not enough in our personal lives, in ministry, or even in our jobs. Being counterproductive is subtle, especially when we are not intentional in the way we seek to understand and minister in our particular context.

1 Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 53.

2 Rom 12:4.

3 Taken from the Online Etymology Dictionary, <http://www.etymonline.com>, accessed January 13, 2012.

One of the theological principles set forth by the authors is that God loves the city. This love does not imply that his love for the suburbs has diminished; rather, it is a call to awaken the work that needs to be done by Christians in cities. Through this principle, I have been challenged to develop a deeper love for my own urban community.

In addition, Living System Ministry promotes the understanding of the local church as a subculture of the larger culture. This opens one's eyes to see that all the components of a city impact Christian effectiveness in that city. For example, in my city of Queens Village, New York, there are at least fourteen ethnicities, from African-Caribbean to Vietnamese. How can we live out the gospel in these diverse cultures if we do not know where they are or if we do not foster relationships with other Christians from these ethnicities, helping one another with resources and learning from one another?

Along the lines of sharing resources and learning from one another, it is of quintessential importance to develop teams of churches to work together to affect the city. It is a fallacy to think of ministry as one individual church being enough, no matter the size. A group of churches working together can adequately reach a city as each individual church seeks to be more interrelational and cooperative. Through LSM, we are reminded that the church of Jesus Christ is called to preach the gospel while working together as one bride of Christ. Denominations, which are often seen as separating the church in this area, are not the problem; rather, unhealthy competition or selfish egos put wedges between us as members of the body of Christ.

Ultimately, anyone serious about ministry must be committed to biblical principles, which at times seem to be antithetical to our natural⁴ choices and practices in ministry. The Bible speaks deeply to our present day and teaches us many things about the interconnected nature of the body of Christ and how it interacts with the broader, fallen system in which it finds itself. We must read the biblical text with fresh eyes to see that the church is indeed a living system and needs to be treated as such. Our programs may not be the solution to the problems with which we are dealing; we must seek solutions aligned with God's living system design and oriented toward the multiplication of disciples.

Programs can be useful, but we often do not check to see if our programs are adding to the positive changes we want to see in the city or if they are actually counterproductive. LSM teaches that, as teams of churches, we must be aware of the unintended negative returns that are a part of any ministry or program conducted in a fallen world. Ministries can have a deeper impact on their city if they evaluate their ministry to check for unintended returns. This evaluation process is not for the faint of heart; constructive criticism even from other Christians can be uncomfortable and difficult to hear, but just as some cough medicines have an unpleasant taste, they are necessary for healing to occur. Using LSM to evaluate ministry in the city encourages us to be impartial.

Through the LSM approach, we can learn how living out the gospel can become a tangible reality in a city. The church must be visible in its city, not in terms of a larger, brighter sign, but rather that the residents see Christians caring for and involved in the community. Tools developed with LSM principles help churches understand and manage the different needs of a community. Instead of each church trying to be "all things to all people" in the community, churches working together can be assigned different tasks based on competence, resources, and success rates. Jesus taught this lesson, too. He told the disciples to have the hungry crowd of 5,000 sit down in manageable groups.⁵

As living systems are interrelated, ministries have great impact on each other, though this is not often readily seen. Every individual church's role helps the broader body of Christ in changing a city. Considering the church as an organism is helpful in understanding this interdependence. No organism can live on one element; it needs multiple factors to sustain life. A plant needs water, sunlight,

⁴ By natural, I mean the normative way we tend to practice church polity and ministry. Sometimes, we lose the balancing act of juggling ministry relationships and leadership relationships, and, as Christian leaders, we are not too good at admitting that we have misspoken or that we have been unrighteous and sinful in our judgments of others.

⁵ Matt 14:13-21.

nutrients in the soil, etc. This idea challenges the church to see ministry more than isolated evangelism. Compassion, support, education, financial help, and information on current issues also factor in as elements needed for life. The church is challenged to broaden its perception of the city in which it finds itself as it seeks to be relevant to the issues of its community.

Churches and ministers must constantly be aware that their best efforts can produce unintended negative consequences. When adequate evaluation processes bring these consequences to light, the effective minister identifies the problem and repents of it. Hall says, “If we choose not to . . . walk in this practical, horizontal repentance where we continually process the negative feedback given to us by the real world, be assured, we will fall into the gap” of simplistic plans and negative consequences.⁶ In our churches, we typically ignore the feedback of others or feedback from the system. LSM teaches us that unintended negative returns will happen and that we need to identify them, repent of them, and come up with new approaches.⁷

In the same way that any ministry should be aware of unintended negative returns, ministries should also be aware that unintended positive returns can come out of their work in a city, and that they need to be on the alert to see these fruits as well. Evaluations geared to uncover unintended returns can best be accomplished in teams that gather the physical and social data of the city, looking for both negative and positive returns.

For the past two years, I have studied and implemented many of the principles of the Living System approach outlined here. My interaction with these principles has broadened my scope in a few areas: (1) my view of the city, (2) the biblical mandate to remember the marginalized of the city, and (3) the need for partnership. I have seen how my church can partner with others to affect our city with the gospel of Christ.

In the first area, my worldview on ministry was limited to static evangelization and the expectation that people would come to my church simply because we love God and people. However, I have learned that love without action is incomplete. Living System Ministry has taught me that the city is larger than the mission and vision statement of my local church. Second, LSM has taught me that the Bible commands me to be mindful of others who are overlooked by the larger culture. I mentioned that the church is a subculture of the larger culture. LSM reminds me that Christianity goes out to the highways and byways to build relationships with those who are different. This is not to advocate syncretism or universalism; rather, it is a statement that we are to remember Jesus’ teaching about helping the least among us.⁸ Third, the need for partnership is paramount to the church’s part in the work of God; we have the honor of being actors in God’s production of redemptive history in our city.

I encourage any seminary student, current pastor, or lay leader to read *The Cat and the Toaster* and learn more about Living System Ministry. You will undoubtedly gain a deeper insight into God’s love for the city and his people.

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6 Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 165.

7 Ibid., 124.

8 Matt 25:45.